

THE
NOMADES OF THE WEST;

OR,

ELLEN CLAYTON.

BY

S. DOUGLASS S. HUYGHUE.

"But all is o'er the Indian's grave,
Pause, white man! check thy lifted stride!
Cease! for the flood thy power to guide,
Tide is given, one sigh sincere
For those who once were monarchs here."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CHAPTER I.

THE PRINCESS AND HER COMPANION—THE REUNION AND
THE GUERDON.

LET us now transport ourselves to another part of the royal abode of the Princes of Lahunzel; that appropriated to the female portion of the establishment.

It was a long gallery or saloon covered with a carpet of aloe-cloth, figured with an intricate pattern in lively colours, and hung with rich tapestry of cotton and feather-work, or *plumaje*; the former festooned at intervals to the carved cornice, with loops of massive gold. On these hangings were portrayed, in brilliant hues, birds, fruit, and flowers. The ceiling was of aromatic cedar, inlaid with woods of different colours, and richly carved. Several vases of silver, gracefully

shaped and very large, were placed on stands at certain distances along the middle of the chamber, and contained the choicest flowers. Around these vases were entwined bands of interlacing serpents in chased gold, whose diamond eyes glittered and flashed with life-like intensity from beneath the fresh leaves and flowers that hung over the rim of the vessels, and imparted fragrance to the atmosphere with their dying breath; a faithful allegory, old as time itself, of innocence and subtlety combined—the beauty and deformity of being.

The rest of the furniture consisted of tables, stools, and couches of wood carved into grotesque forms, richly gilded, and in some instances covered with embroidery.

But the peculiar feature of the apartment consisted in its being open to the air on one side, throughout its whole length, with the exception of a range of piers encrusted with alabaster tracery, that divided it into so many doorways through which appeared a veranda of gilt lattice-work, half covered with creeping vines. Between these wreaths of screen-like foliage could be obtained charming glimpses of a sweet wilderness of flowers and shrubs, and the jet of a fountain in a terraced garden that overlooked the lake, on the waters of which a fairy archipelago was grouped in unpruned luxuriance; like a flock of

birds reposing on the bright expanse. And amid the foliage of several of these islets a gilded pinnacle or white tower reflected the sun's rays, and formed a favourite resting place for the eye; while, far in the back ground, above the groves, the mountain wall that made the boundary of this little world reared its shadowy mass in a grand crescent of blue ridges and snowy peaks.

But it was not to gaze upon the splendour within or without, nor to inhale the perfumed air alone, that induced the two sole tenants of this sumptuous retreat, to make it their place of sojourn at that sunny hour.

One of these, a tall, well-rounded woman, of about twenty-five, with large, dark, and melancholy eyes, was of a most winning aspect, and her clear cinnamon-coloured complexion, as well as the dreamy languor of her manner—still more than her apparel, proclaimed her to be of Indian origin.

Her black hair, straight and glossy, was wreathed with flowers, and on her forehead was bound a green stone of rare value, set in gold:—the Chalchivtl of ancient Mexico. Large ear-jewels of carved pearl-shell, touched her curving shoulders and gleamed among the meshes of her hair. She wore a sort of short tunic, fitting close to the figure and reaching to the swell of the hips; this was made of crimson hair-cloth, fine and silk-like,

open in front and trimmed with ermine. Below this was a triple-skirted robe of the finest cotton, dark blue and crossed by diagonal lines of a lighter shade, in a large net pattern; with borders of worked embroidery to each skirt, fringed with pendants of gold and pearl shell, placed alternately. Over this lower garment also hung the tasselled ends of a shawl-girdle of variegated colours.

The bosom of the Indian was half exposed, in the manner of the Arabians; and heaving with her breath in measured undulations, in the shade of its swelling curves was an amulet of turquoise, encircled with pearls.

Upon her arms, which were bare and beautifully formed, were clasped several bracelets of mosaic, turquoise, pearl, and other gems; and her small feet were clothed in sandals of delicate workmanship, richly embroidered, and fastened above her ankles with jewelled bands.

This queen-like and graceful woman was half reclining on a couch, upon which she had just thrown a folded book of maguey paper, the papyrus of America, inscribed with hieroglyphical character and containing the odes of Nezahualcoyotl, the royal bard of Tezcuco.

She had been reading aloud, but was now engaged in shading from the light, with a feather

fan, the face of her companion, who was seated upon a low stool at her side with her head reclining in her lap.

This was a young and slender creature whose form was veiled from head to foot in a loose gown of white silk, fastened down the front with clasps of amethyst, and round the waist by a zone of gold, in linked stars, studded thickly with pearls. A delicate shawl of lilac rested loosely on her loins and spread its ends of silver fringe upon the carpeted floor.

Her hair which like her companion's was black, though of a more satin-like texture, was divided smoothly on her small head, and brought in long plaits over her breast in the Sioux fashion; there were flowers likewise wreathed around its dark and wavy circumference, but her attitude had partially crushed them.

How strangely radiant was the countenance that appeared in profile, as it reposed partly on her arm, which was bare from the elbow, and partly on the lap of the Indian! How beautiful, and yet not with a beauty of mere form and hue, though the latter was as far removed from that of her companion as the pearls that shone upon her breast; for like those pale jewels of the sea, the complexion of the maiden was of a waxen fairness, and seemed to emit light, as from an inner shrine.

That figure had expanded into womanhood, that mouth had acquired an air of thoughtfulness, and those eyes a deeper intelligence since last we beheld them; the stamp was not impaired but chastened with a sweet sobriety by time and care.

There was less liveliness perhaps, and less bloom, but the features were more perfectly marked and intellectual, and they still retained that innocent serenity of expression which was the best charm of a face whose delicacy seemed only a translucent veil to the bright spirit beneath.

We cannot fail to recognize the lost Ellen in that simple but most becoming garb.

But her mouth contracts suddenly, and her eyes which she had just closed, open with a start. The thought, whate'er it was, disturbed her greatly, for she uttered a sigh and a tear stole from her eyelids.

The daughter of Unicum, for such was the quality of her on whom she leaned—bent quickly down and looked enquiringly into her face, demanding at the same time, in Dahcota, with the tenderest solicitude,

“What is it, my beloved one, my soft fledgling? I would call thee my daughter, but dare not, else it offend thee. The air is too sultry, or that which I have been repeating to thee hath made thee sad; or it may be these odours are

more than thy sense can well bear? In that case we will to the *azoteas* where it is fresh and cool. Or stay; let me run to one of the garden fountains and bring thee a cup of water to wet thy forehead with; it is a charm against weariness and pain, as I have often proved."

"Heed it not, dear Consocil," answered Ellen, checking the kindly impulse; "it was only an idea. Call me anything thou wishest and I will love thee for it. But relate to me, once more, what the cacique told Orazin about the finder of his shield; the time has elapsed now that was to have brought him here, and still he comes not. He was my friend, Consocil, and, as it seems bent upon liberating me from the hands of him whom, as I told thee, made me captive, at the time Orazin himself set me free. I would fain know for a certainty, whether it were indeed so, or if he chanced only by accident, to be in the Dahcota country.

The Indian smiled and laid her fan delicately over the face of the speaker, as if to hide from her own eyes, the blushes with which it was suffused; but she gave no utterance to her thoughts, whatever they were, and only sought to do what was required of her, in a simple and soothing manner.

"My little white dove, the light is too strong for your eyes, I see very well. You are not so

coarsely made as the brown people and therefore must be treated very tenderly, even like the flowers, 'else, peradventure, they fade;' as the bard saith. Now shut them close up and rest under the feather shade, while I tell thee what Orazin said.

"The grand Tecuhtle, which you must know is the title given to the chief of our merchant nobles, a rank of honour in Lahunzel—came home suddenly from the plains beyond the mountains, bearing the shield which he chanced to drop, and which it grieved us so much to lose; not for its value, or for that it was a heritage from his father's father, but rather because it might endanger the safety of the nation, by quickening the desire of such as happened to find it, and so lead them to search for the pass through the hills, and to discover the secret place from whence it came. But now Consocil, my beloved—said Orazin—no danger will come to Lahunzel through me; behold! the antique shield of Mexico, with which my ancestors fought, hangs again upon thy husband's arm.

"So Orazin was joyful for the good fortune that had befallen him. And he said moreover, that he who picked it up was of thy complexion, and that he was close upon thy traces when he, Orazin, bore thee away from the valley of the plains.

“That he had followed, year after year, striving to reach thee without avail, but with his whole heart! Dost thou hear, my daughter? with his whole heart! Those were the very words, the Tecuhhle spoke to Orazin, and he is one who looks sharply into a thing and cannot be deceived; we call him Tazinco, the shrewd.

“Then the king and the council said, go Tazinco and bring this white stranger to the virgin who is with us, as he desires; for you see, my dove, it was only on that condition, he would give up the shield.

“Therefore set thy heart at peace, for he will come shortly and with gladness, I am very sure.”

“It is not that, indeed, it is not dear Consocil; for I know him well,” was the reply. “But alas! many feelings rush over me, and give me a strange uneasiness of spirit when I think of all that I have gone through since we parted. I am not what I was then. Perhaps it will grieve him to see this, and perhaps he too is changed.”

Ellen spoke constrainedly and with bitterness, as she gave involuntary utterance to the secret fancies which prove a never failing source of self torture to such, as, after a long absence, are about to be restored, and yet tremble at that restoration to those of whom they have mused and thought, and dreamed until their very lives are become

incorporated with a sentiment which it would be death to blight.

"What does my white dove mean?" enquired the princess tenderly; withdrawing her fan and looking gravely into Ellen's face. But ere the latter could reply, steps were heard in the adjourning passage, and a signal was made at the door of the saloon, which caused the blood to rush impetuously into the girl's cheeks, and ebb as quickly when the Indian princess hastened to obey the well-known call of her spouse.

One minute later there were two still in the chamber, but Consocil was not one of them; the expected stranger had substituted himself instead, and Ellen was fainting in his arms.

And yet she clung even more closely to the faithful breast that supported her, and warmed into new life beneath the caress of Conrad who murmured his delight in burning words, and smoothed with his hand, her soft hair, thrilling meanwhile with an ecstasy he had never known, as he felt the heart of the long lost one throb fuller and quicker, each instant, against his own.

In that emotion, the luxury of a long existence seemed compressed, and it amply requited him for all his toils and oft'-thwarted hopes, the blissful consciousness of his success. He never proved until then, the measure of his deep love for

the maiden, or the rapture it could bring; and now that he was absolved from his former vow, never to desist until he had found her, he made a second, and far less difficult one, never to part from her again.

And when Ellen withdrew herself at length from his embrace, and threw herself in a fit of weeping upon the couch, he felt his tenderness also grow too mighty to be controlled, so he sat himself by her side and drew her unresistingly towards him, and with her head on his shoulder and his arm enfoldng her, the lovers mingled their tears.

How strange it was! Neither remembered then, that they had never given expression to a sentiment stronger than that of friendship, during their brief but memorable acquaintance, the circumstances connected with which, placed them upon a footing of familiarity that might not have been so unrestrained, had it taken place under different auspices, or at a later period of their lives. Yet no avowal appeared essential to let them know that they were all in all to each other; that the thought of this very meeting had haunted them, day by day, and kept alive the embers of a solitary hope when all other sources of comfort were swept successively away. They beheld, felt, understood it all by a weird sympathy, fleetier and more eloquent than words.

They were the same as they had ever been, unchanged and devoid of guile, or a single thought which they would wish to hide from each other. And it seemed natural, and not extraordinary, that they should be sitting thus affectionately together; while the intermediate time was obliterated, and for all his manliness of appearance Ellen could have believed that her loved Conrad had never been separated from her, and that a few hours, only, were elapsed since she bid him adieu, at the door of Notokeel's lodge. Then also, the latter beheld, in the spiritual and perfected woman, only the simple hearted girl who had trusted herself with him on the waves, and called him "friend,"—such is love! Not that mis-named counterfeit which passes current with the crowd, a transient phrenzy that raves itself away; but that interlacement of being with being, that mysterious energy which is capable of the most exalted aims and the most heroic sacrifices; that perfect forgetfulness of our individuality which causes us to crave with an incessant craving for the sympathy of another, which, if granted blesses, but which, being withheld, blights to the core; the true spirit-passion that o'ermasters the material,—the love of the soul!

And when their wilder emotions subsided down to the meager capacity of words, what a host of sweet sensations swarmed about their long exiled

hearts, as they related to one another the long history of their wanderings, and how their faith had often well-nigh failed them: and how some incidental circumstance ever intervened like a Providence, to give them succour in their time of sorest trial! And how they had been made happy by thinking of the days they had spent together, and that after all, they would meet again. "For I knew," said Ellen, looking with moist and trustful eyes into her companion's face, as she made the soft avowal; "I knew that my friend would grieve for my sake, and do all he could to rescue me from him who stole me away so cruelly, on that autumn evening when we parted, not for years, as it proved, but for a short half-hour only; and in this belief I seized an opportunity and dropped a box of Notokeel's on the way, thinking that, perchance, it might be the means of guiding such as were sent in search, on the route of the unfeeling enemy. Alas! I little knew then, what I was doomed to suffer, and how many long years were fated to pass, ere I should behold a kindred face again! It was a great mercy, without doubt, for it saved me from the anticipation of evil. And as the days wore on, bringing no help or signs of rescue, I often languished, ay, well-nigh unto death, dear friend! But in my tribulation I thought oft-times of thy kindness and affection,

and waited patiently for the term of my bondage, which I believed, sooner or later, would surely arrive; and it was only when our master took us, Notokeel and myself, to the end of the great lakes, and many seasons passed, and no word came to us from our friends: it was only then that I gave up expecting thee, and imagined that thou hadst gone home and contracted other friendships. Yet I knew thou couldst not forget Ellen altogether," added she half playfully, putting her hand in that of her companion, and then immediately looking grave, and speaking in low faltering tones: "not little Ellen who was with thee in the shipwreck and the forest journey, when she had no other soul to trust to or call friend."

"I never, never could, indeed dear beloved!" exclaimed Conrad with fervour: "and though the token of your flight, which in due time we found, led to no further result, on account of the winter that drove us back in despair—yet I never thought of resting contented with that single attempt, nor have I desisted from the search then commenced, up to this present time; fortune was discouraging and tardy in taking a turn, but I am rewarded at last."

"Now is it the plain truth, what thou art saying?" enquired Ellen with an expression of commingled wonder and joy depicted in her

ingenuous features, which her emotions had suffused with a rich bloom: "Hast thou wandered solely for my sake into these far wilds?"

"I have so dared," replied he, "though I often felt it to be somewhat presumptuous, inasmuch as we had not known one another long, Ellen, and I had no right to think you would respond to my feelings and justify the course I undertook. I awoke as from a dream, when our pleasant communion was so broken, and found that it was not friendship but love which urged me on. Will you accept it, dearest? we are alone in the world; why should our destinies be disunited?"

What could Ellen say? Or rather we might ask, what fair lady would refuse her favours to one so faithful and devoted?

Assured are we that the appeal was not in vain. But had we caught the whispered confession or the withering dissent, supposing such, this pen would not have published it to the scoffing world.

We have our ideals of the inner life, our shrined pearls which no unhallowed breath must ever sully, and thou, fair Ellen, art of them.

CHAPTER II.

EXPLANATIONS.

Hour after hour, those united ones remained in rapt abstraction from everything in the round world but their happy selves. Side by side they threaded each walk of the terraced garden and lingered by its fountains; or gazing out at the soft landscape beyond its wall, took no heed of the lapse of time, until the long shadows crept over the vale, and the breeze grew chill from the ice-peaks, proclaiming the close of day.

There was so much to feel and to explain in this their first interview, that had they occupied a dreary waste, debarred from all outward enjoyment, for the time at least, they would have been content.

Conrad was now put in possession of every particular relative to the abduction and subsequent

movements of the captive girl, from which we will select such as have not been, already detailed or suggested to the reader.

As the Mohawks had surmised, the secret foe had withdrawn with his prisoners, by the river of the Onondagas, and reached the shores of Lake Ontario ere his course was suspected; and thus made good his retreat by following up the western coast for a considerable distance, until the increasing danger of the navigation obliged him to desist, and go into winter quarters, where he remained secure from all pursuit. This period of her captivity, which extended over the whole of the ensuing year, was the most distressing and dreadful of all to the delicate Ellen, and she could never think of it in after days, without a shiver of repugnance.

How she survived the rigours of that terrible experience, without injury to her tender frame, she could not tell; exposed as she was, to cold and tempest, to rude fare, and often ruder indignity from her savage master, who in the first instance, seemed inclined to treat her like a common menial, and no doubt would very soon have released her from all earthly bondage, had it not been for her friend and companion Notokeel, who, sufficiently submissive in other respects, to her faithless foster son, rose like a tigress against him, when-

ever he ventured to assail her "Water-fly," as she loved to call her, with even a harsh word. Eventually, a sort of tacit agreement was made between them, which left Ellen to Notokeel's entire control: a concession claimed by the Indian woman, in virtue of her original bargain with the conjurer, and which he was disposed to yield, for the sake of insuring her domestic services; as his distracted fancy and sense of loneliness, at times, grew too oppressive for him to bear, and caused him to feel all the more desirous of securing the comforts of a home.

After a time, also, he became more accustomed to Ellen's presence, and being subjected to the daily influence of her gentleness and refinement, his natural enmity melted imperceptibly away, and before he was conscious of it, he experienced a sort of compassion for his helpless captive: while her beautiful face assisted largely, without doubt, in moulding to a softer disposition the mind of the fierce savage. The tranquillizing tendency of social life also checked his constitutional failing, in a very remarkable degree. From that time forth his paroxysms of temporary insanity and gloom became less violent and soon ceased altogether to appear in their original form; though they assumed a new phase which proved a source of periodical anxiety to those who were

obliged to accompany him through his after course of alternate wandering and repose, among the western tribes.

Crossing over, from the head of Ontario, by the portage to Lake Simcoe, as soon as the second Spring opened, the Abenake conjurer made his way to the extremity of Michigan, and took up his abode with the Pottowattomies, being resolved to put in practice a long contemplated design, as soon as he could obtain the means. This was to seek for some new country towards the sunset, where by the exercise of his craft, he might obtain a greater share of popular favour than he had enjoyed, and at the same time insure himself against all chances of pursuit, which, notwithstanding his audacity, would sometimes haunt him with dark and uneasy forebodings; for he knew the Mohawks well, and that he would have to go very far ere he could put himself beyond the reach of their indefatigable vengeance.

With these people, and afterwards, among the Iowas, he succeeded in his character of Medicine-man, beyond his expectations, and found a powerful auxiliary in a quarter whence he had least looked for it.

To his surprise, even his imposing mummerly supported by a wild eloquence and a ready cunning that never forsook him in emergency, proved

insignificant and fruitless, compared with the spell created by the mere appearance of the fair creature, who seemed so out of place in his lodge.

Ellen was the first white female who had ever penetrated into that far region, and her remarkable beauty excited not only the deepest admiration but a sentiment that had in it much of reverential awe; for the natives evidently regarded her as one of a race of beings superior to themselves and not to be treated without respect.

Often would the Mystery-man find his hearers difficult to retain with all the address he could employ, and clamorous for admission to the pale medicine-woman in his lodge; and he discovered that there was a more potent charm in a single glimpse of her sweet face, than in all the juggling and necromancy he possessed.

This knowledge he now resolved to turn to good account, and therefore, announced, shortly afterwards, that, by the force of his incantations, a power direct from the great spirit descended to him in the likeness of a woman, at certain periods of the day, and that all those desirous of benefiting by it, must come to him at such times, only. And the better to encourage this superstitious belief, he altered his mode of living, which his increasing consequence had already somewhat improved; purchased handsome skin lodges, and horses, a rare

and costly luxury in that county—and tried by every attention to the comfort and privacy of his captive, to favour the illusion which her advent created, in the minds of his credulous hosts.

The trick succeeded to admiration, and Ellen experienced a singular alteration in her condition, for which, at first, she could not readily account, and she had no wish afterwards to deprive herself of the benefits it conferred; as she knew that the deceit, however unwarrantable, was harmless in its effects. Therefore, the poor girl hailed it as a blessing that granted her a respite from the suffering and annoyance, which the intrusion of curious strangers had occasioned her.

From this time she began to rally, and would have recovered her original tranquillity of mind, had her singular master been enabled to overcome his morbid propensity for change: which, after a period of inactivity, would suddenly seize upon him with the fury of insanity, and compel them to strike their tents, mount on horseback, and continue their progress, in wandering search of some new sojourn, towards the west.

In this manner Ellen was subjected to a course of strange vicissitude and trial, unparalleled in its curious admixture of light and shade; not of outward circumstance merely, but of that inward world whose delicate fabric is checkered also by mutation,

and torn by occasional tempest. Yet the grand and glorious scenes, through which she moved, acted as a restorative and preserved the balance of a mind so sensitive and so severely tried.

In her greatest adversity she was consoled by the thought that she could not be entirely friendless and uncared for where there were such manifest traces of the hand of deity, in every thing around; she commended herself to that eternal presence which made even the dreary solitude an abiding place, trusting that it would be to her both a guide and a shield.

We need not speak of her struggles with her hard destiny, her maiden alarms at finding herself amidst warring, wild-looking hordes; of the forlorn nature of her prospects; these will readily suggest themselves to the reader.

Through all however, Notokeel was her steadfast friend, ever near to ward off evil, and solicitous as a mother about her comfort in the smallest particular of her daily routine. The poor girl turned to her as to her only human ally, endeavouring meanwhile, to diminish the debt of gratitude she felt, by reciprocating as much as possible her devoted affection.

Ellen never for an instant supposed that her warm-hearted nurse and companion was the original cause of a calamity which had exiled her from

civilization, and forced the current of her existence into a channel where it seemed bewildered and lost.

But the time had now arrived in which she was to undergo a new change of condition, and that too when threatened with what she could not fail to consider as the greatest misfortune in the position in which she was. This was the loss of her Indian friend who for some time had showed strong symptoms of a decline; and Ellen while she fulfilled the gentle offices of a nurse to her ailing companion, trembled to think of the blank in her lot which her death would occasion.

But she was not now the shrinking, childish girl she had been a few years before. Her nature had grown strong in its feebler parts, and definite in all its faculties. She could regard now steadily and without alarm, much that caused her terror, in the first moments of her captivity. Her resolution, always a marked feature of her character, had deepened with her growth; and as she unfolded in the purest mould of womanly beauty, in the winds of the prairies, so her moral being acquired its matured aspect, under a Spartan-like severity of training. There were no chimeras now to torment her with indefinable fear; what she had to dread were the simple concomitants of a life for which she was unfitted to a degree,—and these she nerved

herself to endure with the humble fortitude of a religion above pretence.

Personal insult or injury, she did not apprehend; the first had never been offered to her, throughout her wanderings, in any unseemly shape, and her master, in his altered mood, showed no inclination to repeat his former harshness towards her.

Matters at length seemed to proclaim that the long expected crisis was at hand; for while travelling from the village of the Medicine-Bows, where they had been staying for a short period, Notokeel found herself too unwell to proceed further, and they had halted for the benefit of the invalid, and erected their lodges in the secluded dell where Conrad and his party soon afterwards found her, when the following incident took place; we give it in Ellen's words.

"I was sitting in my lodge, as was my wont, when not attending to poor Notokeel, working some Indian embroidery: our master being absent in quest of a buffalo, as we had small store of provision by us; when I heard the clatter of horses feet coming down the valley. Now thinking it only the returning mystery-man, I took little notice of it, when all at once, a stranger came into the lodge, of so remarkable an appearance that I could have screamed outright, had he not checked me at once, with a smiling air, and placed his

finger on his lip, saying low, in the Dahcota tongue, ‘Peace, maiden, I have a secret for thee; listen to what I say!’ I could not find words, so much was I surprised at the apparition of the stranger knight; for he brought to my mind what I had heard of those heroic beings, in the books of romance, which we deem unprofitable vanities, and are not permitted to read; his raiment was so resplendent with gold, feathers, and costly gems, and his weapons also, for he was armed, as if for battle. Nevertheless his aspect was very mild and did not excite thoughts of cruelty; as many men of war whom I have beheld, so I listened quietly to what he had to say, which was passing strange.

“His name, he said, was Orazin, and that he was a chief of a wise nation, beyond the mountains, who were in want of a teacher to instruct them in the knowledge of the true God—the *Cause of causes*—as he termed him.

“He said, moreover, that he had been advised, in a dream, to go to a certain place in the plains of the sunrise, and there he would find an orphan virgin with a white countenance, like one of their saints or ancient divinities, whose name I forget, by whose assistance they could obtain that of which they stood in need; and that, having submitted it to the expounders of dreams, though there was a difference as to its meaning, the

general opinion pronounced it to be an especial revelation and not an allegory, and therefore to admit of the plain interpretation only. Accordingly the chief rulers bade him fulfil the injunction of the dream, and he, Orazin, put on his war panoply and took his spear and shield, as therein commanded, and crossed the mountains, and found the valley and the tents, and everything, just as it was foretold. Now was not that strange, Conrad?"

"Who was this Orazin?" asked the young man, somewhat coldly; giving no heed to the question, and contracting his lips and brow with an expression of pain.

Ellen looked at him in surprise, but seemed to divine quickly the cause of his disquietude; for putting her arm gently through his, as he stood leaning over the terrace, she said with an arch smile, "Why, I never thought of it; all this time I have never told thee that. But I deemed it no matter, because thou seest he is the husband of the Princess Consocil, the king's daughter, who was with me when thou camest here."

"Then it was he who conducted me hither, from the place of audience?" rejoined Conrad, with the air of one who has just thrown off an intolerable burden.

"Even so, my friend. It was Consocil's husband. Thou wilt like him well."

“Go on now, Ellen,” said our hero; and she continued her account:—

“Well, when he told me this, and proposed that I should go with him to his people, I was very much perplexed. His story was so miraculous that I could not but doubt its veracity, notwithstanding the knowledge of my condition which it disclosed. Yet when I looked in his face for the signs of guile, all suspicion seemed to fade away from my thoughts, for there was in it something truthful and solemn, that rebuked me for the injustice of my imaginings—as though he read my heart in my eyes. Therefore, when he had explained to me, more fully, the nature of his errand, and the direction of his abode, I could not but look upon it as a Christian’s duty to do what was required of me; and, moreover, it would place me in a condition of life more tranquil and suitable than that in which I was; for, oh, Conrad! I was weary unto death of so much wandering and so many strange faces, and felt that I would give the whole world, did I possess it, for a little rest. Yet I could not bear to leave Notokeel dying, as I believed her to be, and I told him so, and all that concerned myself, and the reason of my being alone in the wilderness, so far from my own people.

“Then he endeavoured to persuade me to seize

the occasion and liberate myself from captivity, and trust to him, for that he had a wife who would be my friend; and at the same time, he showed me that my staying could not save poor Notokeel, if it was her allotted time, and that if I rejected his offer then it might not be well for me in the end. The minutes were precious also, he said, as my master would soon return, and then it would be too late to escape, without peril.

"Well, at last I took resolution and consented; and bidding Notokeel a sorrowful farewell, I was soon flying on my prairie horse, with the stranger cavalier, in the direction of the mountains." The end of the story is, that I reached this place in safety, and proved the honesty of Orazin; the rest thou knowest."

"All save one thing, beloved."

"And what can that be?" inquired Ellen, timidly; for she felt that she was on the verge of a disclosure which it had been her object to avoid.

"The name of him who stole you from us, and obliged you to undergo a slavery so terrible and long. You have not told me either his name or the tribe to which he belonged. Was he a Huron, or a false renegado—a Praying Mohawk?" and Conrad clenched his hands fiercely, and looked with sternness into the face of his betrothed.

She hesitated and turned pale, while a choking sensation prevented her from speaking for a time, and Conrad repeated his question before she could summon firmness enough to reply.

"It was neither, dearest; but an Abenake juggler, with less reason at times than a child. I bear no malice towards him; he knew not that he did wrong."

"His name, Ellen? his name?" demanded Conrad, his features flushed with a strange agitation, and his eyes dilating in a stare, as a horrible suspicion crept like a grasp about his heart, and held it fast.

"Bizon-ko-kok-has," said the maiden in a low voice, though she strove to accompany it with a smile, which like a brief sunbeam flickered and disappeared as she added: "The Medicine-owl, as he uncouthly called himself, with whom thou wert when the generous hunter rescued thee, Conrad, as I heard thee once say. But we may not harbour uncharitable thoughts, or do an injury to any mortal being. I might have fallen into worse hands, and been reduced to a more direful bondage by a Christian foe. He forbore many evil ways for my sake. Therefore, dear Conrad, let him rest."

It was the man's strong nature wrung by intolerable anguish; it was the avenger's madness

struggling with the dictates of a higher faith; it was the phrenzied sorrow of a heart that could pour itself forth and break over its outraged humanities, its acute sense of unmerited suffering and wrong, that Ellen witnessed then. And when the sharp agony had calmed itself away to a more moderate train of feeling, Conrad clasped his betrothed, sobbing and speechless to his breast.

"My poor, wounded dove," he murmured, "thou hadst indeed much need of rest. Thine was a mournful destiny, and had what you have just told been only whispered to me before, it would have driven me mad. I cannot comprehend how you survived the awful tyranny of that man! One thing is no longer a mystery to me now, however, and it will teach us to be more circumspect in our future movements; the knowledge that each step we take may be noted by a perfidious enemy."

Conrad then related what he beheld in the mountain cave, being fully persuaded that the hideous reflection in the water had been occasioned by a visit of the sorcerer himself, and not of one of the solitary inhabitants of that region, as was supposed; and the cunning and pitiless animosity of the man led him to believe that he had already tracked them to the entrance of the

valley, and that he would leave no method untried to effect his purpose; whether it were to avenge the loss he had sustained, or to recover possession of her who was a necessary coadjutor in his scheme of lucrative fraud.

Seeing, however, that what he said excited uneasiness in his companion, Conrad gave a new direction to her thoughts, by breaking to her, as gently as he could, what he had not intimated as yet; namely, Notokeel's death, which shocked her very much, for she had been strongly attached to the faithful Indian woman, and her scrupulous conscience reproached her for not remaining with her friend, though it would have cost her more than a strict sense of duty commanded her to sacrifice.

She was comforted, however, by the thought that her place at the sufferer's side had been far better occupied by that long-lost and fondly-deplored son, whom Notokeel recognized in the person of the *voyageur*; one already known to her, by report, as he had been the theme of conversation between her and Conrad, at the time of their first meeting.

Musing thus of many things tender and sad, and recalling past associations which sentiment had made dear; and far older memories on which early sorrow threw a chastened and religious light;

the young lovers, as we have said, took no heed of time. Absorbed in their blissful reunion, they knew not that the sun had set and that the shades of night were gathering dimly around, when they were restored to consciousness by the arrival of Sewantis-walie, who came towards them from the verandah that communicated with the garden in which they were. The Indian warrior now beheld for the second time the fair object of his friend's attachment, and received from her lips a warm and graceful acknowledgment for all his exertions in her behalf.

Yet an observer might have deemed the Indian strangely indifferent to the charms of a sweet face and voice, heightened as they were by no ordinary feeling; for after taking the hand she held out to him and answering by a few brief words, he retreated some paces and leant against the wall of the terrace, with an air of cold abstraction, in which he seemed to wrap himself as in a cloak of moody reserve.

Ellen could not help being somewhat hurt at this strange demeanour, and though she was constrained to admit, from all she had heard, that the young Mohawk possessed a true and noble heart, she whispered to herself, that he was very unsociable, if not proud; and being the chosen friend of her beloved, she would fain have wished him

more cordial and pliant in his disposition than he chose to be—at least with her. As for Conrad, his power of observation had become eclipsed for the time by a stronger faculty, and he could distinguish nothing clearly just then; so that he was unconscious of what was plainly visible to his companion.

In a short time also Consocil and Orazin joined the group; and in the company of these friendly souls Sewantus appeared to grow less distant, until, at last, all appearance of restraint was excluded from the social circle, and the first evening passed swiftly and pleasantly to the newly arrived visitors of the Lahunzels.

The Mohawk had made another acquaintance that day: one which, little as he supposed it, at the time, harboured the most deadly design against the interests of those whom both friendship and a warrior's faith impelled him to protect.

CHAPTER III.

THE HIGH PRIEST AND THE EVIL EYE.

WHEN Unicum left the court of audience, shortly after Conrad, Sewantus, in company with several gay young nobles, sauntered leisurely among the lively crowds that still lingered in the corridors and outer courts of the palace.

The courtiers received the stranger everywhere with marked distinction; and took pride in pointing out and explaining to him such objects as were most capable of impressing him with an exalted idea of the resources and skill of the nation. While such as spoke the language of the eastern plains plied him with numerous inquiries about his own country, the extent of his travels, and the wonders he had beheld; to all which he gave a patient and pleased attention, regarding the gorgeous painting and sculptured imagery with

grave composure, and answering his manifold questioners with sententious candour and independence.

There was a remarkable degree of self-possession and dignity about him that was superior to vulgar surprise, and, though he was really transported by amazement at every thing around, his native pride would not allow him to make the least concession to his hosts or cause them to regard him as an inferior, which they might have done, had he openly acknowledged his admiration and ignorance on that occasion.

It was a species of policy, peculiarly Indian-like; but those who have had recourse to it under similar circumstances are fully conscious of its advantage, and Sewantus never played the stoic with more entire success; for the Lahuzels, finding that they could make no visible impression on the foreigner by a parade of their choicest works of art, gave him credit for a degree of connoisseurship which he did not possess, and acquired at once a high opinion of one over whom they could not obtain even a solitary triumph.

There was one among them, nevertheless, who seemed particularly desirous of ingratiating himself with the proud-looking stranger who trod, with such a free step, those painted halls.

This was a tall, maiestic person, clothed in the

dark symbol-figured robes and dishevelled locks of the sacerdotal order,

Sewantus had remarked him at the king's levee, and had been struck by his appearance, and now that he stood before him and scanned him closely with his eye, he felt that he was one not to be passed by with a glance of ordinary observation. There was a kind of intellectual atmosphere about this man, which threw a chill over the lively group as soon as he joined it; for the speakers grew suddenly silent, and dropped off one by one, until Sewantus was left alone with the tall priest, who accosted him in accents so calm and assured, and with so precise an articulation, that in defiance of himself he listened; though he felt that a portion of his confidence was already gone. Strange to say, at the mere voice of the priest, his armour of proof melted away like frost-work, and left him vulnerable to an adversary.

Tugal Tanub, the chief priest and astrologer of the city, had raised himself into eminence by the force of ability alone. Of a vigorous and imaginative intellect, he succeeded in introducing a new exposition of the popular mythology, by clothing it in the attractive imagery and harmonious congruity of parts, suggestive to a highly poetical mind; and at the same time obtained no slight celebrity for his skill in reading the sidereal

signs, and prognosticating, from the motions of the heavenly bodies, the ordinary events of life; a forecast of which has been an object of man's desire from the earliest ages of the world. Nor did the exterior of this expounder of the starry oracles in any wise detract from the unbounded sway which his endowments gained for him over the more devotional part of the population.

His face was well formed, masculine, and of a pale bronze; his nose prominent, his eye small, deeply set, and meditative, but possessed of a spirit in itself; for by turns it could freeze like ice, and pierce like steel, and burn like a bolt of fire. But the two most remarkable elements of the face, and those which bore the strongest impress of the powerful faculties of the man, were the mouth and brow. The former, thin-lipped and delicately formed, curled, contracted, or quivered like a struck chord, while he spoke; as if the words had shapes and moulded the pliant portal to them as they rushed forth, propelled by the master-energy. The latter, more fully developed than is common to the American type, was an emblem of lifeless calm. Its fixed and smooth placidity was the crowning cypher of the tablet, and yet its fault; you could read there depth of thought and self-abstraction—but a solitude profound. There was nothing kindred with the pursuits or sympathies

of other men, in its cold severity that feeling ever softened, even to the humanity of a frown, and that sat in perpetual judgment, as it were, above the frailties of the crowd. But with this twofold physiognomy, devoted, as it seemed, below the eyes to passion, and above to thought; if Tugal Tanub could not excite love he could command, what he believed to be of greater moment, the respect and reverence of his fellows. And as he swept along, in his mystic garb, elevated in stature as in intellect above the mass, the high priest was an object of general interest which the great Unicum, himself, might have envied.

Sewantus, as we have said, was not unmoved by the presence of this individual, who, as if to improve, still further, the advantage he had obtained, persuaded the foreigner to accompany him into the city, whether for the purpose merely of holding a conversation out of reach of the public gaze, which he appeared to shun, or for some sinister and secret object, Sewantus was unable to conjecture. But he was strongly inclined to doubt the honesty of his intention, from the pertinacity with which he continued his advances, although they were but coldly returned on the part of the Mohawk; who, conscious that he was dealing with one that it would require no ordinary ingenuity to foil, kept his faculties keenly on the

alert, to scent out the first proximity of danger, while he followed his priestly guide. Yet he betrayed neither his suspicions nor the vague sense of uneasiness which he strove in vain to eradicate from his mind.

After leading him through one of the principal streets of the quarter in which the royal palace stood, the astrologer arrived at a neighbouring *teocalli* or temple, and from the summit of the pyramidal terrace, on which the structure stood, displayed before him the magnificence and extent of the city, demanding with an air of pride, in which could be detected the arrogance of a self-conscious superiority—"If it were not very beautiful and great?"

Now the Mohawk, as we have shown, was not in a humour to appear wonder-stricken at any thing, nor did he belong to a race addicted, at any time, to the paying of compliments; therefore he replied with imperturbable coolness,

"Sewantus-walie has seen a larger gathering of lodges than this at his feet; ay, many times."

"Where could that be?" inquired Tugal Tanub, with a supercilious smile.

"In the Buffalo country, beyond the frost hills, yonder."

"And who were the builders?" rejoined the priest; "they must, certainly, be great and wise."

"For wisdom they surpass all," was the quiet and wilful reply; "but for the matter of bulk they are not renowned; being a little reddish animal with a short tail, something between a fox-squirrel and a ground-hog. You can tell them by their barking, brother; they call them the prairie dog."

And when, environed by the splendours of the sanctuary, which was decorated with painting, sculpture and precious stones, his conductor led him up to the base of a great altar, open to the sky, upon which a flaming fire of odoriferous wood sent up clouds of smoke into the air, and proclaimed it to him as the true *master-god* and soul of all things,—the following dialogue took place.

"Now how can this thing be?"

"It is the material of the sun and stars. It makes the ground bring forth, and ripens the grain. Its light is a smile, and its heat nourishes the life of every living creature."

"But if it does this which is good, it does, also, that which is evil. I have seen it wither up the grass, and rage destructively over the forest, consuming every green leaf. Did you stay not its course it would devour the world! Water is stronger than the fire, for it quenches it. It is a powerful medicine, but no God, for it requires a guiding hand!"

"Does my brother do sometimes that which he knows to be wrong, and yet cannot abstain the less, for all that knowing?"

"He does."

"Then he can see that there are two great influences at work; one of good, and one of evil. The evil sometimes overcomes the good, but the good is the greatest in the end, for it prevails. Fire is the creator of the world, and all that lives therein; therefore, it is a God!"

"There are things over which it has no power—but to destroy."

"And what are they?"

The fruitage of winter—the ice and snow. Who has dominion over the winter—that good time? It cannot be the evil influence, for it gives us plenty, and swells the heart of man big with gratitude and gladness. My fathers believed that there is a something greater than the fire and the frost, which are but tools in its hand. The child of the Maquas cannot do better than follow after them; for they were wise."

The priest was astonished at the readiness with which the other met his specious arguments, to prove the divinity of that subtle and universal agent which a higher knowledge of physical science would have enabled him to invest with a far stronger semblance of omnipotence; showing that

in the very ice itself was imprisoned a portion of the mighty element of which light and heat are the distinguishing properties. Still less was he prepared for the announcement of such an exalted faith, in one whom he had looked upon as a stolid barbarian, incapable of the sublime idea of an invisible and supreme God, which was only then obtaining a definite ascendancy over the polytheism of his nation : so he demanded,—

“What is that master-power?”

“I cannot tell,” replied Sewantus; “No one has ever seen its likeness; but it talks in the thunder and the winds, and fills the silent places with an awe. Perhaps it is like a thought, which is invisible and yet everywhere. You cannot feel it by the touch, and yet it will control the actions of a whole people. In my dreams I see it sometimes in the shape of a very old man, sitting on the clouds. But dreams are crooked pathways that often mislead.—I put no dependence in dreams!”

“Yet is there a sign for a symbol of everything visible and invisible, by which it can be known and remembered. Mark down on this scroll the master-power of which you speak.” And Tugal Tanub took up from a table, by the side of the grand altar, a red crayon and a roll of aloe paper, half covered with hieroglyphical characters,

and handed them to his companion. But the latter put them back with an impatient gesture, observing, somewhat haughtily:

Sewantus is a plain warrior, and not skilful in picture making. Besides it is a dangerous business that leads into perplexities and lies."

"Do you make no use of it then, in your country?" inquired Tugal Tanub with surprise.

"Sometimes," was the reply. "I have seen it in the war-path painted upon bark, but took little heed of it; knowing that it could be used two different ways, and cheat a friend as well as an enemy. Among the Maquas, there are wampumbelts and legends. They are much better, for they never lie!"

"And hast thou no name for the God ye avow?" cried the priest with a sneer; "do ye build up no altar nor offer sacrifice to him, when ye pray?"

"Wherefore should we build up altars? have we not hills? retorted the other with dignity." "There the Great Spirit bends over and blesses his children when they go to him with an open heart. It is enough!"

"The *Great Spirit*," murmured the priest, with lingering articulation, and the sublimity of the phrase sent a thrill to his inmost soul; while instinctively his eye rested upon the star-crowned sanctuary, whose white and many storied tower

rose in the midst of the painted structures of the city, pre-eminent over its numerous shrines in simplicity and lofty grandeur.

We are unable to tell what higher thoughts the association gave rise to, in the astrologer's mind, but he muttered to himself while gazing abstractedly on the glistening fane :

“ The melancholy time draws nigh ; the doom of prophesy may be gathering now over us and the world. The stranger is right. There is a Spirit greater than the visible and fickle flame : a worker of the destiny of both sun and star, a *Cause of causes !* Wherefore has this knowledge only come to us in these latter days ? Too late ! too late ! The burner may rekindle his fire, but the necessity of things cannot change. The heart has hardened itself unto fate, and quenches its consuming thirst with the dregs of its wild desires, which like the juice of the maguicy slakes but to inflame, and intoxicates but to impoverish the more. Alas ! it is too late for virtue, but not for enjoyment. My whole life has been a sterile dream until now, and the Tezcucan bard* was no fool when he enjoined us to banish care, since the pomp of the world fades soon away, like the

* Nezahualcoyotl, the poet king of Tezcuco, the most accomplished of the Mexican princes, and author of several songs and moral odes of remarkable excellence, few of which are extant.

glimmer of an evening cloud. He who is wise will feast while the banquet is spread, and seize the joys of the present, ere they perish!"

Terminating his dark soliloquy, with an air of moody resolve, he motioned his companion to follow, and issued, abruptly, from the portal of teocalli; when descending together the vermilion tinted sides of the pyramid, they retraced their way through the lanes and thoroughfares of the Indian city.

But not without being observed: for several of the gaily appavelled crowd, among which they wound, turned, in curiosity, as they beheld the finely moulded figure and bold bearing of the warrior; neither was the majestic and gifted high-priest one who could appear in public without exciting attention. And yet there was an individual who remarked the two passengers with no pleased sensations, if we might judge from the fierce scowl which he threw towards them, from his contracted brows, the only part of his face visible; the rest being concealed in the wrappings of a thick shawl.

Those skilled in ocular interpretation could have read, in that burning glance, triumphant malice, mortal hatred and meditated revenge: and it came from a troop of travelling merchants, as their costume and train of laden horses, pro-

claimed them to be, that had evidently just arrived from a long journey, and rode in a long file through the centre of the street; they looked like a band of warriors, returning with the spoils of some far land, with their arms and carefully appointed steeds, their numerous attendants and pack-horses, the latter piled with bales of various kinds, perched on which could be seen many a wooden cage, containing tropical birds, of brilliant plumage, and animals of curious and uncouth form, unknown in that mountain land.

The cavalcade moved on, and winding round a corner in front of the foot passengers, passed over a bridge that crossed an intersection of the canals, and was soon shut out from view by the intervening buildings; yet, to the last instant, that scowling horseman kept his threatening eyes fastened upon the form of the Mohawk, as if he sought to blight him with their basilisk-like glare.

Neither Sewantus or his companion, however, were aware of the close scrutiny with which they had been favoured, and all unconscious of the evil it foreboded, re-entered the now deserted courts of the palace; the sculptured façade of which appeared to grow into mysterious vastness in the sombre light of evening. For the painted awning was now withdrawn from

the terrace, and permitted the eye to range over its whole extent, from end to end ; and above the fretted cornice, over the face of a second story, which was covered with sculpture, in the style of arabesques, divided by compartments of lattice-work, cut in the face of the stone.

At some distance back was also visible the summit of a turreted tower, that rose from the centre of the pile and reflected the ruddy tinge of the sun, which was already veiled in the mists of the mountain barrier.

CHAPTER IV

NIGROSCIVE

AND who were these ingenious builders of palaces and monumental fanes; these industrious rivals of the Assyrians and the ancient people of the Nile; cultivating thus successfully the arts and purposes of social life, in the very heart of the mountains, unknown to the rude hordes that waged incessant war for thousands of miles around, and separated them so entirely from the rest of the civilized world? Patience, forbearing Reader, and thou shalt know all. Alas, thy very desire has sent us fresh-winged into the dim realm of history, and hovering by the sad relics of departed things, to catch the lingering echo of some voice that could inform us of the genius of the past; and enable us to paint in fitting hues the lineaments of those who were once so mighty and

honourable in the land, and are now so utterly forgotten. Alas! what have we rescued from the worm—a shivered sarcophagus—a mocking skeleton; the vital essence is not there!

The narrative of the conquest of México unfolds to us a detail of discovery and adventurous daring, as wild and wondrous as that contained in the most fabulous chronicle of romance. No minstrel in the heroic days of old ever tuned his harp to celebrate bravery less questionable, or achievement more stirring, than that of Cortes and his companions; and yet after a calm perusal of the awful record—the bloody drama enacted by the Spaniards in the New World, the condition and conduct of the two races there brought into such vigorous contrast and such lamentable collusion; we are at a loss to decide where the term “barbarian” properly applies, and to which to adjudge the palm of social superiority in the strictest sense of the words.

Civilization is a relative only vaguely understood and often inconsiderately applied.

If it mean that insatiable thirst of wealth which gratifies itself at the expense of simplicity and honour—if it mean proficiency in the art of war and conquest where religion is only a pretext for the most dreadful crimes, then the Spaniards of the sixteenth century were, without doubt, further ad-

vanced in civilization than either their Christian contemporaries, the Moors of Grenada, or the Aztecs of North America. But, on the other hand, if it be intended to express that moral interest which all culture should subserve, the practice of the arts, pursuits, and softening amenities of a state of society, giving encouragement to commerce and stability to law, then the rude crusader of Castile with all the *prestige* that Christianity and chivalry throw around him, was little worthy of his position in the social scale. Notwithstanding the greatness of the acquisitions, in a certain sense, of those rapacious warriors, the humblest disciple of the Redeemer who strove to "do to others as he would be done by," was the true champion of the Cross, of right against prescription, and in the field of real improvement worth them all.

In forming an estimate of our predecessors, it is only fair to test them by the standard of the time in which they lived; yet if the laxity and fanaticism of the period be admitted in excuse of the enormities practised by the followers of the great Columbus, a similar allowance must grant an equal indulgence, at the very least, for the barbarous usages of the Americans. The wonder is, that with the first revelation and experience should have produced such unworthy fruits, when

a self-directed instinct alone did so much for the nations of Anahuac.

It is startling indeed to find, that in architecture and sculpture, the allied tribes of Mexico rivalled the Egyptians, and in the efficiency and elegance of their armour equalled the polished nations of antiquity; that by the admission of the conquerors themselves, their goldsmiths' work was superior to that of the most famous artizans of Spain; and that in gastronomy and chronology, two very opposite sciences, we must allow, but affording, either of them, no bad criterion of progress—they had arrived at a perfection unknown to their European adversaries.

Neither was that civil polity unworthy of praise, where the avocation of the merchant was held in especial esteem and led to the highest preferment, and this too in a state essentially warlike and subject to the most rigid military restriction, whose very tutelary deity was the terrible Huitzilopotchli, the Mexican Mars!

In each principal town hospitals were erected for the sick and infirm, and public business transacted by well-organized departments of law, commerce, and finance; while females were entirely exempt from servile drudgery or jealous restraint, and presented a striking exception to the irregu-

larities which mar the domestic picture among so many polished and semi-barbarous nations.

Idleness was not considered becoming, even in a noble, and mendicity unknown; while intemperance bore the ignominy of a capital offence, and theft very rarely occurred. Envious barbarism, indeed! for it gave no impetus to vices which sprout so rankly in the hotbed of modern society.

The religious faiths of the two antagonists, widely different as they seemed, were not substantially so in their effect; if the acts of either be admitted as a criterion of creed. Both were irrational and impure.

If one was defiled by the most inhuman rites, the other was immersed in a cloud of superstitious intolerance that rendered it equally hostile to peace and intellectual progress.

In the knowledge of those abstract truths which belong to natural law, neither was deficient; but not content with the simple code which the Deity has inscribed upon the human heart, and blindly inimical to their interests they planted upon it a superstructure of mysticism and fraud.

He who contemplates with horror the hecatombs of victims offered up at the shrines of the Aztecs, must also remember the abject image

author was supposed . . . of those beyond its pale. And yet these despised denizens of an infant world, with the ignorance, had more of the innocence of childhood about them than their sordid task-masters. He must remember the unrelenting persecutions of the Inquisition, the iniquitous wars sanctioned and encouraged by the arch-priests of a faith that enjoined the most unscrupulous proselytism, and gave its votaries ample license to devastate, rob, and slay; a terrible compromise with Mammon, proving but too plainly, that in that, as in every age, the spirit of heaven was made subordinate to the spirit of earth. The god of this world is gold! The wing of the destroying angel hovered over the blood-stained teocalli, it is true; but though the altar of the Christian was free from the accursed shade, it accompanied its besotted devotees in all their enterprises, darkening their reason and stifling kindly feeling in their breasts, until, where they should have sown a blessing their footsteps left a blight.

In reverting to the records still extant, of the early history of the Mexicans, it appears that advanced as they were, at the time of the conquest, they were yet inferior to their predeces-

sors, the Toltecs who emigrated in or about the seventh century, from the mysterious city of Atzlan, in the north west, and founded Tula, the capital of a dominion which soon extended over the beautiful valley of Mexico, and beyond its limits to the remotest confines of Anahuac; under which signification was comprehended that wide Indian empire which their descendants subsequently occupied. These people were ingenious and refined; being skilful agriculturists, architects and workers in precious metals and enjoyed the advantages of a religion which, unlike that of the Aztecs, found expression in the simple offering of fruit and flowers. In consequence however, of famine, pestilence, and unsuccessful wars, they were finally broken up, after a reign of four centuries, and migrating from their chosen seat, dispersed in bands over Tecuantepec, Guatemala, Maya, (or Yucatan) and the coasts and adjacent islands on both sides of the isthmus of Panama; giving rise, in all probability to the recently discovered cities of Palenque, Mytla, Uxmal, and Copan."

From this people are supposed to have sprung the Aztecs or Mexicans, and the Alcolhuans or Tezcucans; the two most remarkable of several kindred tribes that took up their abode in the deserted valley and territories of the enlightened Toltecs, carrying with them the rudiments of

knowledge which they inherited from their ancestors—comprising a systematic and precise method of computing time, more perfect, strange to say, than that of the Europeans themselves, antecedent to the Gregorian reform.

These two races built the rival cities of Mexico and Tezcuco, on opposite sides of the beautiful lake to which the latter has given its name. There they flourished rapidly, under the auspices of successive sovereigns, though not exempted, nevertheless, from those occasional disturbances which are the lot alike of nations and individuals, in this ever-fluctuating scene. As it is not our wish to invade, any further, the province of the historian, it will suffice for our purposes, merely to state that a triple alliance was subsequently entered into between these two states, and that Tlacopan—the kingdom of a cognate though not numerous tribe, whose possessions bordered on the valley lake, in the immediate vicinity of the island—the site of the Mexican capital. Thus united, the confederates soon obtained entire sway over that part of the continent, to the shores of the two oceans, which, by securing uninterrupted tranquillity to the central valley, enabled them to make those advances in every thing save religion, which was the marvel and admiration of those, who, after a period of two hundred years, were destined, by

an inscrutable providence, to sweep, like a consuming fire, over the land, and to obliterate almost every vestige of their civilization from the face of the earth, and the history of the human race.

In character and relative position, the two most powerful members of the confederacy, the Tezucans and Aztecs, resembled in no slight degree, the rival kingdoms of Greece and Rome. The former, intelligent, thoughtful, and refined, exercised a potent influence over their warlike and less polished neighbours, who, nevertheless, equalled them in the mechanical arts, and the truly oriental style of luxury and splendour in which they lived: nor would they consent to adopt the brutal practice of human sacrifice, until the Aztecs, by their energy and growing passion for war and conquest, had acquired supreme sovereignty over every tribe in the valley, and made many a people formerly secure in its remoteness, acknowledge the potency of their arms and the rigour of their exactions. Then all Anahuac became impressed with the dominant type, and actuated by a common ambition. And well and nobly that proud warrior race supported its reputation for bravery and political pre-eminence, when called upon by an event, to which history presents no parallel, to rally round their banners

and sacrifice their lives in behalf of their independence.

The picture of battle rushes up before us in its vivid portraiture, its moving and romantic assemblage glittering with the paraphernalia of antique war, and eloquent with the stern poetry of passion,—the wild and the sublime.

When, host after host, their plumed battalions, with all the pomp and appurtenance of barbaric chivalry,* rolled on to meet those steel-clad invaders, who realized to their eyes the fabled centaurs of old; and mounted on their fiery steeds, with flashing swords and thundering arquebuses, might well appear to them as some unearthly creation clothed with the attributes of divinity itself, against which it was in vain to strive. Yet, in the face of prophecy and superstition, and though the steel and fire-arms of the European mowed them down, like grass before the scythe; still unceasingly poured on those undaunted and seemingly irresistible patriots, day by day, and night after night—covering the causeways and lake, the cemented streets, the canals, and even the flat roofs of their Venice-like city, with swarms of defenders who strove, by self immolation, to exhaust the small band that bore the brunt of their accumulated power, with so little comparative injury.

“It cannot last,” said they to Cortes: “We

are content to lose a thousand for the life of every white man, and you must soon be exhausted." Alas! they knew not the resources of the whites. But they did what was still in the power of men in their condition to do, and did it honourably.

Step by step, they contested the progress of the inexorable strangers, piling ramparts of flesh in their path, as they fell, in heaps, before the close fire of the artillery, and beneath the iron hoofs of the horses; and throwing themselves, with naked breasts, upon the swords of the cavalry and the mouths of the cannon, until the breaches, thoroughfares, and canals were choked up with their dead bodies.

At length the horn of the lion-hearted Guatemozin rang through the streets of the beleaguered city, and at that dread signal, which no Spaniard who heard it ever forgot, the Aztecs made a simultaneous rush upon their enemies. It was the last struggle of an expiring empire, and its fury drove back, for a time, their detested assailants. But only for a time: famine and pestilence soon came, like vultures, to the scene of havoc, and spread rapidly in the crowded capital, adding to the horrors that environed them in their straitened prison. Yet they endured all without a murmur, or a single sign of acquiescence in the strange decree of Cortes, that they must submit

to a foreign yoke. Nor was it until the latter, impatient at so obstinate a resistance, determined to destroy the city, and levelled as he advanced, each dwelling-house, palace, and temple, that they would be brought to yield. • •

Worn out by incessant fighting and misery, a wretched shred of a once mighty population ; their last hope of divine aid, and last glow of national pride expired for ever, as they witnessed the destruction of their beloved sojourn, the beautiful imperial city—the mistress of the surrounding plains.

When the object and the power of opposition were both gone, there was nothing left for them but to submit ; and from that day, the great empire of Mexico became an appanage of Spain, and its survivors slaves.

CHAPTER V.

AN EXCURSION—WHO THE LAHUNZELS WERE—FULFILMENT
OF THE PROPHECY.

SOME days after the period referred to in the preceding chapter but one, since which, no incident worthy of note took place to vary the tranquillity of their lives in the secluded valley; the visitors accompanied their friends, Orazin and Consocil, on an excursion to the cluster of islands, before spoken of as situated in the upper part of the lake, beyond the peninsula on which the city stood.

The day was clear, the atmosphere delicious, and the spirits of the party in glad unison with nature's mood. They landed several times from the carved and gilded piragua, and explored the romantic retreats in the neighbourhood, enchanted with the surrounding scenery; which, from the gold-covered and fanciful pavilions of lattice work,

erected on many of the islets, was less like reality, than the ideal of some fairy region. It was therefore, late in the afternoon ere they set out on their return: and induced both by the beauty of the weather, and a dislike to break the charm that seemed to deepen around them, as the day subsided insensibly into the languor of a soft twilight, they let their bark glide gently along, past the groves and hanging gardens that fringed that side of the city promontory, on which the royal palace was situated, until rounding its extremity, they came in full view of the painted city and the miniature bay, which, even at that late hour was dotted with numerous barges and canoes, containing a portion of the pleasure-loving population; who could step from their very door-ways into their skiffs, when it so pleased them, and trace their way by the canals, into the lake, with a facility that made the mere act itself, an agreeable recreation.

The scene was imposing in the extreme. The glassy wave washed with a scarcely perceptible undulation against the marble terraces and quays, and reflected the proud palaces of the nobles, which rose in long lines above the humbler structures; and, occasionally, a teocalli, with its grand outline, and brilliant tinting of vermillion—a favourite colour with the Lahunzels. Thus, with terraced roof and turretted tower, with vast pyra-

mid and smoking pinnacle—a picturesque array—the majestic pageant appeared in duplicate beneath; while the city itself seemed to float and fluctuate at freedom, on the elastic tide.

The crowd of minute craft that occupied the intervening space, furnished, also, a curious accessory to the picture; for each was ornamented and shaped after the especial whim of its owner, so that among them might be discovered, the likeness of every fish, bird, or insect, known to the inhabitants of the valley,—and perhaps a few of an apocryphal class besides. But the effect, upon the whole, was tasteful and surprising, and some of the decorations were very finely executed; Orazin's piragua rose in a graceful curve at the prow, formed of a cluster of cactus-leaves, upon which a majestic eagle stood, with outspread wings, holding a serpent in its talons. This device—the symbol of Tenochtitlan, the capital of ancient Mexico, was of wood, richly gilt, and admirably carved.

Inspired by the universal harmony with a kindred sentiment, many a loiterer sent forth a strain of music from his floating car, which softened by distance broke with the plaintive sweetness of a vesper hymn, upon the ear; and at times two boatmen would sing verses alternately, as they pursued each his different way—in the

manner of the gondoliers—until the lengthened chant died away, long after they were out of ear-shot of one another.

“Music is a meet banquet in a time like this,” observed Orazin, suddenly; starting into enthusiasm and putting to flight the pleasing reverie in which all had indulged. “It is good that we put to profit the example set us by yonder revellers; for thou canst sing sweetly too, Consocil—my household bird. When they have heard thee, our friends will say—Orazin is born under a tuneful sign; his mansion is brimful of music, as a flower with odours, it is the breath of his beloved. Now sing us that song of thine, about the cities of the ancient people; I like it well.”

The Princess looked up into her husband's face, with a tender smile, and taking up a stringed instrument upon which she had been playing in the previous part of the day, and which seemed to combine the qualities of the tabor and guitar,—she struck a few chords, by way of prelude, and accompanied herself in the following stanzas, arranged in the ancient dialect of Tezcuco, to a dirge-like air.

THE ANCIENT CITIES OF AMERICA.

They lie amid the lonely wilds,
Where human eye may seldom hail
Up-towering through the forest aisles,
Their pyramids and temples pale.

Age upon age has rolled away,
And nations, proud of warrior fame,
Have laid their bones beneath the clay,
And left behind a doubtful name;
Yet, ere the sunbeam o'er them smil'd,
'These hoary relics grac'd the wild!

The hunter drives his shaft of stone
Amid the chisel'd sculpture there,
And, wond'ring, marks a drooping throne
Degraded to a serpent's lair;
And in the still, gigantic halls,
The graven forms of chieftains brown,
In shattered grandeur, deck the walls
With legend, mace and feath'ry crown :-
Symbolic proofs of pomp and power
That perished, in some dooming hour.

Telling, in strange and mystic phrase,
The story of an antique race
Whose wisdom made, in ancient days,
A marvel of that lonely place:
That liv'd and lov'd, that toil'd and died,
And left, fond fools, those works to show
The destiny of human pride,—
The vanity of all below!
The green vine clasps the Idols grim,
The vampire haunts the shadows dim.

And this is all!—No single tone
Remains to break the silence dread,
Or murmur through the chambers lone,
In accents of the mighty dead.

In mournful beauty, deep they lie,
Rob'd in a veil of leaves and flowers,—
Like some wild dream—a pageantry
Of temples, palaces and towers
Half crumbled by the tooth of time,
But hallow'd with a touch sublime.

Go ye who feel ambition's fire,
And contemplate that truthful scene,
Rememb'ring, aye, when thoughts aspire,
The ruins of the forest green ;
The useless toil, the thwarted will,
The blood and tears of myriads rung,
The measure of one cup to fill,
That, breaking, left the task undone.—
O, meekly bow thy haughty head
In musing on the nameless dead !

“Even so;” moralized Orazin, when the rich and thrilling tones of the singer ceased, and he had interpreted the words of the song to his foreign guests. “When the great circle of Time is completed, we too shall pass away, like the insect from the halls it constructs with so much pains, for its sojourn of a day !

“All the round world is but a sepulchre’, saith the poet; the bodies of those who were once exalted with vain glorious pomp and empire, are but the loathsome dust of the funereal urn.

“Where are the great, the wise, the valiant and the beautiful? Alas ! they are mingled with the

clod. And so it will ever be, my friends. Therefore, let us take courage and aspire to that heaven, where everything is eternal, and corruption cannot come!"*

The mournful reflection was scarcely uttered, when, as if in response, a thundering roll of music burst forth from the central tower of the city, and swelled with a booming reverberation over the waters, spreading from steep to steep, like a pent-up-torrent of sound, until the far mountain ridges caught the startling summons and replied to it with a moan.

It was the great disc of metal, which, at stated periods through the day and night, proclaimed the lapse of time and the devotional exercise it enjoined, to the people of the valley.

So striking was the coincidence, and so much were they effected by the sentiments of Consocil's song, that even to Sewantus, the whole party bowed down, by a common impulse, to the Sovereign of the universe, and offered up a short prayer; and each boatmen resting on his paddle, turned him devoutly to the western peaks, from whence the latest tinge of the luminary

* A quotation from Nezahualcoyotl's (supposed) "Ode of the Flower," a specimen of which is given in Prescott's Hist. of the conquest of Mexico, Vol. I, p. 174. For further examples of the composition of the Tezcucan prince, see p. 157; also Vol. III, p. 376.

had just faded; while over the little bay every sound grew hushed, until the holy tocsin-peal died gradually away.

Then, with sudden effulgence, a ruddy light diffused itself around, and half dispelled the gloom that had now gathered in the valley; and when the devotees raised their heads, every temple-top throughout the city was a beacon of brilliant flame; and like so many volcanoes, roused into spontaneous action, the altars of the pyramids illuminated the whole neighbourhood, with the force of twilight, which was thus rendered perpetual, throughout the darkest night.

These eternal fires had an indescribable effect, and threw vast shadows which moved, phantom-like, as they flared in the upper current of air, casting a lurid gleam on the towers and great edifices, and the terraced groves of the different quarters; while, over all, like some mystic constellation, spread out on the air itself was faintly revealed, the starry crown of the middle temple, the only one upon whose altar there was no fire.

Associated, as every thing in that vale was, with mystery and romance, the strangers could scarcely reduce in their minds what they beheld, to the level of a real fact. Their senses, ever since their arrival, had been warped into an aerial region where life was not a thing of common ex-

perience, and all their preformed conceptions were destined to meet with opposition and discomfiture. They had not recovered, as yet, from this mental confusion, nor reconciled to themselves the wild ideas that sprang forth under circumstances so extraordinary.

Conrad, burning with curiosity to learn something of a people, so different from any with whom he had been cast, in the course of his discursive career, endeavoured, on several occasions already, to draw from Prince Orazin the information he desired; but without obtaining other than vague and random shreds of explanation, which far from appeasing him, only gave a stronger stimulus to his imagination, and a more ardent thirst to penetrate to the bottom of the mystery that enwrapped the Lahmzels. And now, possessed with the most lively sensations, by the incidents of the time, he resolved to make a direct appeal to Orazin, in behalf of what he believed to be, less a presumption than a right, which it were not the office of a true friend to refuse. Therefore he said, somewhat markedly;

“The stranger has feasted in the hall of Orazin; he has seen his greatness and the wonderful devices of his brethren, and yet, when he listened to the sweet song, and the temple signal, and saw the people bow, and the kindling

of the altar fires; he felt that he was only a stranger, after all.

"He laments that he cannot be as a brother, with those whose thoughts and ways, and traditions he does not understand. Why is this? He feels that he is a waking man, and yet he sees every thing around him as in a dream!"

Orazin looked at the speaker, with an expression of deep concern upon his noble countenance, which grew into strong relief, like the effigy of an ancient Roman, with its masculine precision and short wavy beard, in the light of a torch now placed at the bow of the vessel.

"Thy chiding is sharp, my friend," replied he, mildly, "but my shield is stout enough to turn away its edge, else do I mistake; seeing that in no better security can a man be than behind the buckler of an honest heart. Now listen."

"The welfare of a whole people is not a matter to endanger, by a careless word, and the Lahunels are so unused to strange faces that they have grown cautious of them.

"But if they are slow to yield faith, they can, nevertheless interpret truly the nature of an upright man. It is enough! Hear me, brother; if I was constrained to be scrupulous heretofore, in my discourse, I can speak freely now.

"Thou wouldst know who we are, and whence

we came into the land. It takes me back to the first dot of time, to seize hold of that which ye demand,—the beginning of the tribes.

“A nation came in ancient times, from the right of the sunrise, before all other people, and spread over the high plains and mountains, far off, in the direction of my left arm, when I turn my face towards the roots of the evening shadow.

“They founded cities and grew renowned, for they were skilful and full of thought, and the growth of their hands were the first temples of Cholula, the sacred city ; which they set up in honour of the principle of fire that is in the sun, moon and stars. They were the Ulmecks, the oldest of people and of the cultivators of the ground.

“Then after them, in the same track, came another nation like the starry travellers of the night, a glorious nation ! that mingled with the Ulmecks and became masters of their country and wisdom, and built many more cities and grand temples ; and were famous in the land.

“These were the Toltecos who came from Azlan under Tanub their King, to a place called the Seven Caverns where they founded a city and called it Tulapan, and afterwards another, in the kingdom of Quiché, which they named Utatlan.

“And the kings of Tulapan* and Quiché were of the house of Tanub.

“These people were cunning architects and workers of metals, and excelled also in the fashioning of stucco ornaments: in painting, pottery, and the culture of plants and flowers.

“They could also, interpret the secret meaning of the stars according to the signs they gave, one with the other, and knew how to compute time by the movements of the sun and moon.

“Yet these things came to them, partly from the Ulmecks, who were before them in the land, and partly from their own fathers. And they flattened their foreheads backwards, for a fashion, and lit the holy fire upon their altars, and raised graven images, for emblems of beneficent things.

“Now many cheafs of cycles, in which are numbered fifty two reeds for years* that are as days in the great life of nations, were marked on the calendar-wheel in painting and in sculpture-work, when the time of the Toltecos of Tula was completed, as a people. For they wasted to decay by wars, and want of rain to make food grow; and could rest no longer where they were. So, dividing

* In the chronological system of the Aztecs, the years were thrown into cycles of fifty-two years, called cheafs, or bundles, and represented in the hieroglyphical records, by the symbol of a bunch of reeds bound together with a string.

into bands, each under its chief, they departed out of the kingdom of Tulapan and went further on, over the mountains of fire, and settled down on either shore of the great sea, and in the country between, where they raised other grand cities and monarchies that, perhaps still are; though nothing has been heard of them, for many cycles, and there has been a great desolation over all the neighbouring land.

“One band, however, united with a family of the Ulmecks and strove to go back to Azlan, from whence their forefathers came. Nevertheless, they could not, and so, after many wanderings, they came to this place and built and planted, unknown to their enemies; and here they have dwelt peacefully, even until now.

“It happened, after this, that two cycles rolled away, like a long night, over the forsaken land, and no one came to claim, as a heritage, the lake-valley of Anahuac, when the Chichimecos, a fierce people, hovered about the place where the Toltecos had lived, and nestled themselves, like waterfowl, in the deserted palaces and teocallis.

“Then the great Cause of Causes,—The fire-creator, said to the Northern tribes; go and take the place of those from whose loins ye came! And many tribes went and wandered for many cycles, searching for the kingdom of their ancient

fathers. And the names of the tribes are these :—The Xoquimilches, Chalmeks, Tepanecks, Alcolhuis, Tlahniks, Tlascaltecos and Aztecks or Mexitli.

“And after enduring many hardships and perils they arrived, time by time, at the ancient city of Tulapan, and spreading over the neighbouring valley, close to the mountains of fire, where a few of the Toltecos still remained, learned of them how to plant and fabricate, and filled the country once more with flourishing cities, and with the industry of man.

“Now of these tribes, the greatest for learning was the Alcolhuis or Tezcucans, in whose city the kindred tribes rested for awhile, and therefore it was called Tezcucos, which signifies—a place of rest. But the Chichimecos, for the most part, remained altogether with them, and they became as one people.

“But for war and traffic, and dominion, there was none equal to the Aztecks or Mexitli, who founded the great city of Tenochtitlan, which sat on the salt lake of the valley, like a fair white swan, and became the heart of a great empire which was named Mexico; in honour of their patron Mixitli, the God of war.

“There they dwelt and flourished exceedingly, waiting for the fulfilling of the oracle; after

which, a few who survived that terrible event, with some of their relations of Tezcuco, not wishing to be slaves, departed for ever from Anahuac; and meeting with some wandering traders, they brought them to these mountains, where they found their forefathers, who received them kindly and made a covenant with them to remain in this quiet valley; and they did so, and thus, brothers, the three families became one."

Here the voice of the Prince, which had assumed, latterly a tone of sadness, terminated in a low cadence, like a sigh, as he brought his narrative to a close.

Conrad felt singularly moved by this brief account of powerful and ingenious nations whose career was thus summed up, in a few momentous words: nations that had passed through their several stages of infancy, maturity, and decline, long ere the European imagined the existence of a vast continent in the west; and that, by an inexorable fiat had been swept successively away from the theatre of being, without affording a chance for the historian's pen to give celebrity to their genius, or significance to their monuments; which, judging from what their descendants had accomplished, must have been magnificent indeed.

He felt himself, as it were, standing at the threshold of a world, solemn, mysterious, and

mournful with the wrecks of perished greatness and the traces of mortal vicissitude; a world of intelligence and baffled endeavour, of which he had never heard.

There was, in this, a strange severity that evoked the most profound sympathies of a nature intense, to a degree almost too great for happiness. The heart of the German was like a high strung lyre that sends a quick response to each passing breeze; and strongly susceptible withal of the grand and the unfortunate.

Nor were the sensibilities of Ellen less acutely awakened, for she stole her soft hand into that of her lover, as though she sought the assurance of his protection before the awful image of calamity and ruin, conjured up by the story of those perished tribes.

"Thou speakest of some terrible calamity which happened to the Aztecks, as the fulfilment of a prophesy," observed Ellen, gently: that was passing strange."

"Nothing is surprising that concerns the gods," was the reply. But for the oracle, I should not now be permitted to speak openly of these things, with the children of the sunrise.

"There is a divine will which regulates the thoughts and doings of every living thing, and though it be invisible, it writes its decrees in the

stars. The destiny of the proudest nation is no less under its control than that of the little gnat which hovers over these waters.

"I say again, fair strangers, with the sunny aspect ye are the fulfilment of the ancient oracle: it is perfect and complete in thee!"

"How can that be possible?" asked Conrad; gazing in astonishment at Orazin, who became suddenly more erect, and waved his arm with majestic and prophet-like solemnity, that gave additional force to the reply; while his features, in the strong glare of the torchlight, seemed sharply defined, and inflexible as a mask of iron.

"It is a simple matter, when it is told; and yet doth it move me, as though the lake beneath us was being swallowed up by the ground.

"The decree that crushed a mighty people and made the cities desolate, is no vanity to be lightly spoken of: and, moreover, this day, O strangers! is marked as unlucky in the calendar: one on which the burner gives scope to the fire!"

"In the old times, a man appeared in the vale of Anahuac; a man not like the children of the tribes, or of the ancient inhabitants among whom he came, either in aspect or mind: and he possessed wisdom and power exceeding that of all other men. He was a veritable God, and his name was

Quetzalcoatl—the feathered serpent. And he had dominion over the winds of the air.

“He it was who taught our fathers to till the ground and smelt metallic ores, and to cut the chalchivitl, the most precious of stones. And he gave them regular laws for their government and prosperity.

“His presence was a perpetual sunbeam, a creative energy. He breathed, and the air was filled with delicious odours, and the songs of birds. He moved, and lo! from under his footsteps grew flowers and shrubs, and every thing that gives fruit and usefulness to man!

“Never at any time, was such abundance beheld as then; for an ear of maize could not be lifted by a pair of arms, it was so large and heavy; and the cotton ripened in the down of every hue already to be spun and woven into garments; it was a blissful time!

“But it could not last for ever; so at length the period arrived when this good divinity left the tribes of the valley and the plains, and journeyed to the sea. There he bade them farewell, and stepping into his canoe of serpent skin, departed out of sight, over the great water on his way to the land of Tlapallan his home, and they saw him no more.

“But before he went he told his people, that at

some future day, he or his descendants would return and have dominion in the land.

"Then the people of Cholula built a grand temple to his memory, greater than the greatest of the city temples*; and from that time forth it became a place of pilgrimage for the tribes, and Cholula was called—the holy.

"This good being was of a lofty stature, with a white skin and a flowing beard, and when you looked at him it was like looking at a star.

"Then for many cycles our forefathers waited for his return; and whenever a child was born with a skin fairer than its mother's they were accustomed to regard it as an omen of the coming of Quetzalcoatl.

"Now, in the reign of Montezuma, the second

* These colossal monuments of ancient American architecture, although dismantled, are still to be seen near the modern city of Puebla. The principal pyramidal erection is 177 feet in perpendicular height, and 1423 feet at the base—which is twice the length of the great pyramid of Cheops—and covers a space of 44 acres, that of the upper platform being more than one. It is composed of stone and earth incrusting with alternate layers of brick and clay, and its four sides face the cardinal points, and were divided into four terraces, on the last of which stood a magnificent temple containing the image of Quetzalcoatl—the god of the air, adorned with jewels and gold, and wearing upon his head a diadem waving with plumes of fire. The city in which these temples stood was the Mecca of Anahuac, to which crowds of pilgrims came from the remotest parts of the Indian empire, to offer up their prayers.

of that name, who ruled over the empire of the Aztecks, there came suddenly, out of the sea, a race of wild, bearded men, of a pale complexion, who bestrode horses, and were clothed in armour harder than bronze; and the king and the tribes received them joyfully, saying, ‘Surely these are the offspring of the good Quetzalcoatl; let them have honour.’

“But alas! they were but a band of robbers after all; for they put to death, in the palace of the king, his chief caciques and friends, who were keeping festival there; and what, think ye, for? To rob them of the jewelry and precious ornaments which they wore! By the gods of the Mexitli, it is the truth what I say! for gold was the god of those men, whom the Aztecks mistook for the children of a just father, and called Teules, or divine beings!

“Then the tribes arose and drove the ungrateful guests out of Tenochtitlan. But with many more under their chief, Malantzin,* they besieged and destroyed it, and conquered the whole land, and reduced the allied people to slavery: all but one band, as I said before, who, under a chief of the house of Montezuma, the king, escaped from the stricken land, bearing with them, as war trophies, two of the unknown creatures on which the

* The Mexican name of Cortes.

Teules rode; from which have since sprung the fine breed of horses for which this valley is famous —this of Lahunzel.

“I am a descendant of that sole family of independent Aztecks, that race of warriors,” added Orazin, proudly, “for their leader was my father’s father, a warrior of renown, called for his deeds of battle,—the slayer of men; and Consocil here, is of the blood of Anahuac, for her grandmother belonged to the noblest house of Tezcucó, the city where the great Nezahualcoyotli reigned.

“Now more than three cheafs of years were numbered since my ancestors escaped from the bondage of the bearded men, and gave up human sacrifices for the worship of Lahunzel; and many thought that the promise of Quetzalcoatli would never be fulfilled. And our priests and men of learning began to talk about the unknown God, to whom Nezahualcoyotli built a temple in the old times, saying that he was higher than the sun, and that he dwelt eternally in the clear sky beyond, but, at the same time, was everywhere and everlasting, and potent to save. And that, when we died, our spirits went straight unto Him, and not to the sun or stars; or to animate birds and clouds, as was supposed.

“Then Unicum, our king, being a man given to holy things, erected a temple, and consecrated

it to the one God, the Cause of causes, and put over it a roof of stars.

“Behold! ye can see it now, towering in the midst of the shrines of the god of fire; from thence sounds, betimes, the call to prayer.

“Therefore, when I dreamt the dream, and the dream came true, and the people saw within their secret abode a virgin and a youth, whiter in the face than those false-hearted men, who drove the Aztecks from Anahuac; and saw also that there shone in them a bright excellence above reproach, they said, one to the other, ‘Of a truth, these are the very offspring of Quetzalcoatli the good. Now will the land be blessed, as in ancient time, and we will obtain the knowledge of the true God, for the children of Tlapallan are wise.’

“Therefore it is,” concluded Orázin, with emphasis, “that, as I said before, the oracle is perfect and complete in thee!”

CHAPTER VI.

THE THREE TRIBES OF LAHUNZLL—AN ALARMING DISCOVERY.

THE lovers mused long upon this remarkable legend and its prediction, which would indeed seem to point directly to themselves, and justify the belief that some eventful crisis would signalize their advent in the valley.

They perplexed themselves with conjectures relative to the beneficent Quetzalcoatl; whether he were in reality a supernatural being, or only a casual wanderer from the remote and civilized world, beyond that great eastern ocean which received him on his departure again, ages before the genius of the great Genoese opened a path across it to the greedy adventures of Spain. In either case, however, they both resolved that their visit should not be unproductive of benefit to the people of the valley; especially, in regard to the

all-important purpose, the chosen instruments of which, both ancient prophecy and recent revelation, clearly showed them to be.

Sewantus, who had listened in silence to the foregoing details, now ventured to ask a question which he had held for some time in reserve. Turning to the prince, he said—

“Will my brother explain to me the meaning of the great figures that are cut upon the rock at the door of the valley? I have hunted much and seen many strange beasts, but there are two animals there which I never saw before. One is in the likeness of a bony skeleton; the other, it may be, resembles somewhat the wild cow of the prairies.”

“They are the guardians of the secret portal,” replied Orazin. “There is a proverb in Lahunzel that, so long as they remain there, no danger will come unto the city. Furthermore, know, that they are the chosen symbols or emblems of the three divisions of the people. For the city is divided into three quarters, which are inhabited by separated families or tribes.

“These are the tribe of the Monosekos*, the Kelis-kopan or the Water-bulls, and the Tonatiuh, or the tribe of the Sun; according to their distinguishing sign.”

* Mastodon.

"This is in the very fashion of the Maquas," remarked Sewantus; "they too have three grand families, and three distinguishing signs. Tell us more, my brother, about these things."

"The Monosekos," continued Orazin, "is first of the three, being under the protection of the spirit of that animal which their first fathers saw when it walked, the mightiest of things alive upon the ground. And now that it is dead, they bear its anatomy, as a device, upon their shields and standards.

"These are the descendants of the Ulmecks, who came from the left of the sunrise, before all other people; and as they are the oldest so are they the most honourable in Lahunzel. From them are chosen our kings and priests; they are also great herdsmen and tillers of the ground. They keep the sacred records and study the seasons, the stars, and the virtues of plants and flowers. They are picture makers and scribes; and none can better interpret the meaning of the Teoamoxtli*. The Monosekos are worthy of honour.

"Next are the Kelis-kopan or Water-bulls,

* "The Divine Book," composed by a Teseucan doctor in the latter part of the 7th century, and containing an account of the migrations of his nation, together with their arts, sciences, social and religious institutions. This interesting record is lost.

who flatten their children's heads backwards with boards. These are the offspring of the Toltecos, and are artificers in all kinds of handicraft; fashioning silver and gold into the likeness of natural things, and weaving fabrics of the vegetable down and magüey: the hair of animals and the feathers of birds. They it is who cut the precious Chalchivitl and other jewels into divers forms.

"They are next in antiquity and honour, and are known by the figure of the Kelis-kopan*, a strange animal found in this lake, when they first came to the valley, and which they slew for food. Now, to appease the manes of these dead creatures, they took their image for a symbol, and engraved it in stone and bronze, at the portal of their division, and on their altars.

"The Tonatiuh, or family of the Sun, is the last of all, being, as it might be, the children of the Toltecos, and the grandchildren of the Ulmecks, or Monosekos. What is aged is more venerable than a thing of yesterday, and worthy to be privileged in the land.

* The existence of this animal, we believe, has never been satisfactorily ascertained by the ocular testimony of a white man. But the natives persist in affirming that it still lives in the lakes of the Rocky Mountains, where it is seen occasionally, but only very rarely, as it has the power of remaining under water. Upon the whole, the idea of a Water-Bull is scarcely so startling as that of a Sea-Serpent.

“The Tonatiuh are the remains of those once famous people of Anahuac, of whom I spoke but now; the Aztecks and Tezcucans, that came unto their forefathers in this valley, for refuge from the wicked Teules. They are the merchants, soldiers, and tamanes, or carriers of burdens, in Lahunzel; being by nature discreet, valiant-hearted, and sagacious.

“To them is entrusted the charge of the city, that no disorders happen; and they are permitted to travel in quest of trade with the people of other lands that lie on the borders of a sea, into which the sun sets. They inscribe the figure of a sun upon their arms and banners, and set it up, in virgin gold, within their teocallis.

“Now, each of these great families speak a language which is the same, but yet is not; like relations who separate for a long time, and fall into new habitudes and ways. And each has its nobles and chief men, and its ancient laws; but there is one king over all. And in each division of the people there are three orders of chiefs, each with its Cacique or chief of chiefs, which last is a place very honourable because it is given to the most worthy.

“I say it not vauntingly, though, by the burning throat of Popocatepetl, Orazin has need to be proud. He is the Cacique of the warriors of the sun!

"Tazinco, thou knowest him—is the Tecuhtle or great chief of the merchant travellers, every one of whom is a man of confidence and a sub-leader in his division.

"Besides these there are tribunals of different sorts, and the councils of the king, who calls to them such of the caciques or lesser nobles as he thinks fit, without regard to family or degree. And these are the highest in honour and power, excepting always the king, who with their advice gives judgment over all."

"And Tazinco," inquired Sewantus. "What place does he hold at the council fire? Is he a man of esteem among his tribe?"

"There is none before him," answered Orazin. "The king out of respect styles him uncle, and he stands ever at his elbow to give him the wine of his wisdom when he would be refreshed. He is the only merchant that ever trades with the warlike hunters of the sunrise for buffalo skins, which are not so plentiful beyond the mountains, and such things as we have need of and they possess; for it is held to be a business too dangerous to our secret, to be entrusted to other hands, and only fit for Tazinco the shrewd."

Here the colloquy was cut short by a cry, and Conrad was discovered in an attitude of horror, his eye-balls starting half out of his head, and his

body strained forward in intense scrutiny of some object on the water.

While engaged in listening to the lengthy communications of Orazin, the piragua had been allowed to drift along of its own accord with a faint breeze, and floated insensibly in among the crowd of smaller craft, the several positions of which were sufficiently well defined by the flambeau that each now carried at its bow, and which gave them a singular appearance as they moved, now slowly and now with speed over the surface, like meteors engaged in some mysterious evolution.

Several of these strangely shaped canoes had already passed in their immediate vicinity, and Conrad had drawn the attention of Ellen to the curious appearance they presented with their bird or fish-like form and their picturesque inmates, when all at once he gave utterance to the exclamation which attracted the general notice of the party.

Following the gaze of Conrad, they observed a piragua gliding past, at a little distance, and containing apparently but two persons, besides the rowers; this was all. They knew not that Conrad had just recognised, in the then averted face of one of these two, the memorable features of Bizon-ko-kok-has, the sorcerer. Yes, he could

not be deceived this time, every lineament was wrought out against the dark background with startling distinctness; he had identified it at a flash, in the glare of the torches, and Ellen also caught a glimpse of the well-remembered profile ere it was turned away.

The rest, however, were too late, for ere they could look the person leaned back unconsciously into the shade, and directly after a canoe, shaped like a swan, glided in between, and concealed the first entirely from their view.

"Men, to your paddles!" shouted Conrad, recovering his presence of mind and indicating the course violently with his arm. "Quick, Orazin! tell them to give chase to the piragua, the one beyond the light yonder, with a serpent on the prow. Quick, or we lose it. Ye shall not escape me this time, O mine enemy!"

He did, nevertheless, for though the oarsmen did their best, there were so many lights continually intersecting each other on the lake, which at that spot was particularly crowded, that they became confused, and pursued the wrong party, and finally were obliged to abandon the attempt as hopeless; while our hero stamped with vexation, and appeared to be rendered frantic, for the time, by the violence of his emotions.

"Might not my brother's eyes have played him

false?" suggested the Cacique; who could not believe in the possibility of such an event as the entrance of a stranger unseen into the valley.

"Would that they had!" replied Ellen, with a deep sigh. "Would that they had, and mine also! Heaven preserve us from the terrible malice of that man!"

"Let the Pale Lily be a peace," said Sewantus, boldly; "there are braves enough around her to scare away this Mystery Owl, and clip his wings should he have flown over the rocks upon our trail."

"Vile sorcerer!" apostrophized Conrad to himself, with intense bitterness of feeling, as retracing the way towards the palace, they entered by an archway that led into a basin, within the royal gardens, where they disembarked; art thou fated to cross me in every purpose of my life? Dark spirit of evil, mar not with thy accursed presence this peaceful abode. Yet if there be no human power to foil thy purpose, on my head only let the blow fall. Spare, oh spare her!"

The soliloquy of Sewantus was after another fashion.

"The Maqua has no need of daylight to discover owls. By my father's bones, that other man in the strange canoe was a tall one as he sat! Sewantus saw no face, but he marked him

well. It is an old saying, that owls go in pairs, and I believe it. "Stop a little, and then the Bear will put his paw upon his enemy!" Thus he mused to his sagacious self, as he laid down that night to repose.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TIANGUEZ.

IT was market day in Lahunzel, and the outer square of the palace, which was of considerable magnitude, and surrounded, as elsewhere mentioned, by an unbroken line of piazzas and a spacious canal, presented a most animated and interesting scene.

It was the great Tianguetz, or market of the valley, in which was held the weekly fair that served the purposes of general traffic with the inhabitants, to whom shops were unknown.

The whole inclosure was filled with a motley and bustling throng, engaged in their several avocations and displaying various wares to the public gaze, thus exhibiting in epitome a comprehensive picture of the peculiar civilization of the colony. There, under the broad piazzas, in

several rows, were innumerable stalls laden with a choice array of products and manufactures, adapted either to supply the wants or promote the luxuries of life.

At these, in their respective branches of trade, presided the merchants of Tonatiuh and the artisans of the three divisions, among whom were pre-eminent those of Kelis-kopan, both for the beauty and excellence of their handicraft, and the extraordinary obliquity of their profile, which from the end of the nose to the top of the crown described a single convex line, caused by artificial pressure in infancy to the bone of the forehead.

In another department the chief salesmen were of the Monosekos tribe, as it was appropriated to those arts in which they most excelled, such as the manufacture of paper, parchment, and blank books, together with picture manuscripts of the popular literature, comprising history, science, and poetry.

There, as the idler strolled along the lanes of the porticoes, the bronze lattice-work of which was interwoven with fresh and fragrant flowers, and divided the stalls from one another, he beheld in succession, each in its allotted quarter, fabrics of cotton of different texture, richly dyed or embroidered, or the same material made up into garments of every description in use; among

which were conspicuous the maxtlatl or broad-fringed sash, and the titmatli, a square ornamental cloak or mantle, worn by the middle classes; as also tapestry, *coverlets, curtains, and canopies.

Naquen, or coarse cloth of the fibre of the aloe, made into sacks and working dresses; ropes and thread of the same material, and thick wrapping paper, composed of the pulp of its bruised leaves.

Fine gauze-like webs of the pita, a species of aloe, and used for veils. Stuff made with the hair of rabbits and other animals, woven together; a unique fabric, soft, glossy, and warm; stained with brilliant and permanent colours, or embroidered with some fancy device of birds and flowers.

Thread, spun from a rare species of caterpillar; a costly material, purchased only by persons of rank, and woven into silk in their own households for especial use. And above all, the gorgeous feather-work, plumaje, as the Spaniards termed it, so highly prized in ancient Mexico. This was a kind of mosaic, formed of the feathers of birds of the most beautiful colours; obtained chiefly from the varieties of the parrot and the delicate and lustrous humming-bird. These glued on a ground-work of fine cotton cloth, and arranged like the scales on *the wing of a butterfly, rivalled the latter in splendour and in the

exquisite gradation of the tints, which were as soft and aerial as those of a highly finished painting.

This costly material, only used by the nobles, and chiefly for mantles, was also applied to the decoration of the grand edifices, in the form of hangings and heraldic banners.

There again were the lapidaries, with their tempting display of gems and precious metals, wrought into *bijouterie* of every description; such as ear-drops, jewels for the under lip and nose, armlets, necklaces, and clasps, richly chased in gold or silver, and sparkling with variously coloured gems; among which were the turquoise, pearl, and emerald. The latter, of great size, was often cut into various forms, as bells, flowers, and insects, embossed with pearls on a delicate frost-work of gold. There also you might observe curious imitations of fishes or birds with moveable extremities, like children's toys, but formed in the most skilful manner; every scale and feather being perfect in itself, and laid on alternately in silver and gold. In many instances, likewise, they were decorated with an abundance of jewels, to represent some specific hue.

The young gallant, emulous of military display, was struck with admiration at the brave garniture of the armourers' stalls. There could be seen the

famous escaupil or cotton mail; consisting of doublets of that material, thickly quilted with the unmanufactured down of the plant and variously embroidered, according to each rank and tribe.

Shields of leather, or of cane work and quilted cotton, magnificently overlaid with pearls, and silver, and gold embossings, after some stated design. Casques of wood, tortoise-shell and silver, either gilt or incrustated with devices, in gold, and wrought into fantastic shapes, such as the heads of animals with fierce, open jaws and crests of feathers or hair.

The deadly maquahuitl or sword club, armed with transverse blades of itztli (obsidian), or copper, and capable of felling a horse at a blow. Also battle-axes, javelins, knives and arrow heads of burnished copper, together with splendid surcoats of the plumage; such as the military captains and Grand Caciques wore. In another part of the vast Bazaar were exhibited specimens of pottery in terra-cotta, and wooden jars of grotesque or graceful design; some elaborately carved and gilt, or glazed and embellished with coloured figures in great variety, to suit the fancy of the purchaser.

Hatchets and implements of every description adapted to the workshop or the field, made of copper or bronze, by means of which they could

hew granite and chisel out the finest sculpture, and, with the aid of a silicious dust, cut and polish the hardest gems; in despite of a contrary opinion which prevails in respect to nations unacquainted with iron.

Booths there were, piled with stationery, where the student and man of letters could be supplied with writing materials, of every description known to the citizens; such as blank sheets and books of prepared skin, cotton or fine paper made of the Aloe, tied up in rolls or folded in leaves like a screen, pens of fine reed, pencil brushes of hair, and pots of various inks, among which were the brilliant crimson, scarlet, and purple, made with the dye of the cochineal insect from which carmine is derived, and much used in the hieroglyphical and more elaborate picture writing; the two methods of stenography which in fact, comprised the only system of written language known to the scribes. Then came the stalls of the apothecaries abounding in medicinal preparations of roots and drugs among which were labelled panaceas for every known disease; while in close apposition, the seller of amulets and astrological charms, enticed the timorous visitors to give him the preference, and for an imaginary virtue reject that which was less* attractive because more definite and real.

Then came the confectioners with their sweetened maize cakes, pasties and bon-bons composed of chocolate and the delicious sugar extracted from the Indian corn—

The fruiterers' and sutlers' quarter, where all kinds of provision, fresh or already cooked, attracted the eye and stimulated the palate with the most savoury odours.

Who stands so gravely in his niche yonder, with his apron before him, honing a trenchant blade and eyeing each passer by with a hungry intensity that makes one's blood run cold; for he seems about to dart out upon the victim from his dark hole, like a spider upon a fly? Ah, you need be in no alarm; it is only a poor barber with a growing family. Hast thou a roughness on the chin, thou wilt give him the smoothing of it, for the sake of charity; for by the hand of Unicum! he is a needy man, and the trade thrives languidly in Lahunzel. And yet, neither they nor the Americans generally, were exempted from a certain portion of that hirsute clothing which is a common legacy to the sons of Adam. But with them, it was in numerous instances, too scanty to be either an ornament or an incumbrance, so that the rudimental beard could be plucked out by the roots, without troubling the barber; as most of their trans-

atlantic brethren are constrained to do. Nevertheless, our friend there could shave you as clean as an apple, with his razor of itztli, whetted to the splitting of a hair, and convince you afterwards of the fact by reflecting your visage in his little mirror, of the same vitrious material, better known as obsidian or volcanic flint.

The only sad object in the whole fair was a group of defaulters, offered for sale by those to whom they had become liable, and who by immemorial custom were allowed to satisfy their claims in that rigorous way.

Without the densely thronged piazzas where, however, the greatest order reigned, the spectacle was equally curious and enlivening: for the broad canal along their front, was covered with innumerable small craft laden with the produce of the neighbouring farms, among which was a great profusion of flowers. Environed by the vegetable heaps in these canoes, the country people sat in their best attire, chatting and chaffing with their customers, or counting over the gains they had collected; either in the shape of small bags containing a certain number of grains of cocoa, or simply the grains themselves. Circular pieces of nacre-shell marked with the royal cypher, or single pearls of a specified value, in a plain setting of gold, were exchanged

at the more costly stalls of the bazaar. Such constituted the lawful currency of Lahunzel.

Throughout the open square also, were numerous groups of citizens, in the picturesque costumes of the different classes, conversing freely together and smoking, many of them, long ornamental pipes, or perfumed cigars stuck in tubes of tortoise-shell or gold.

What a gay and bustling scene it was! for stationed at certain points of the area and threading its populous extent in every direction, the eye could discern innumerable hucksters of small wares, in endless variety, and restaurants who distributed cups of the exhilarating pulque, the fermented juice of the aloe, or of foaming vanilla-spiced chocolate, among the assembled crowd. While to and fro, hither and thither, hurried the tamanes (porters) with bales of stuffs, cotton, and other merchandize.

Such was the Tianguetz, over which a chief magistrate presided, and a number of subordinate functionaries were appointed to preserve order, and collect the royal dues: and thickly as the place was swarmed and multifarious as were the transactions, no single breach of decorum could be detected, throughout the inclosure. It was the principal mart, exchange, and general rendezvous of all classes; where engagements of divers sort

were entered into, topics of general interest discussed, and the royal proclamations made public to the inhabitants of the valley. On the present occasion, the popular curiosity had been roused to an uncommon degree, by a rumour which obtained authenticity as the day wore on, and created a powerful sensation in the minds of the people.

A mysterious and most alarming circumstance had just transpired. A well known individual, belonging to the troop of merchants lately returned from a journey to the Gulf of California, had disappeared suddenly, immediately after their arrival in the city, and never made his appearance at all at his family residence, when they separated to their several homes, after depositing the merchandize in the place allotted to it, within the quarter of the Tonatiuh: to which they belonged.

That he had not loitered behind was certain: for a picture record was kept with scrupulous exactness, by an officer appointed for that purpose, at the portal of the valley—in which the number, as well as the personal peculiarities of each one who claimed entrance, were duly noted—and on reference to it, the complement of the caravan proved to be correct, while a more especial proof of the presence of the individual in question appeared in the form of a horseman, with the lower part of his face enveloped in a shawl, which was imme-

diately recognized as intended for the missing merchant, who had been suffering from an injury to his jaw, and kept it covered.

Now the most inexplicable part of the story was this:—

One of the returned merchants, having left the valley, in search of a package of goods which he had dropped by the way, came back in a short time, bearing with him the dead body of this lost companion which was discovered, as he related, lying stripped and lacerated in a dreadful manner, at a little distance from the last halting place, in the vicinity of the secret cavern. And near the body was also lying the carcass of a grizzly bear, the thick skull of which was fractured, as if by a blow that had torn the scalp half off the bone. This appeared upon examining the head of the animal, which with the shaggy hide was brought in for a testimony, with the mutilated remains.

Perplexing and irreconcilable as the matter was, the facts were indubitable; and whatever difference of opinion arose as to the manner in which it had been effected, there was none as to the obvious inference it supplied—that an unknown individual had obtained admittance into the valley, in the disguise of the unfortunate merchant.

This was sufficient to create the deepest alarm in the isolated community, whose very existence, perhaps, depended upon the preservation of their secret.

Once accessible to a spy, who could believe himself thenceforth, to be secure from foreign invasion, or foresee the extent of the evil it might bring upon them in the end? True, a few could defend the subterranean passage through the mountain, against a host of assailants, while the torrent of water itself was a powerful auxiliary, as long as they could depend upon its supply. But in some seasons of drought it only half filled the tunnel of the rock; and the continual watchfulness and anxiety consequent to a state of siege, together with the entire destruction of their foreign trade, which would ensue, were contingencies that they could only regard as terrible misfortunes, and the forerunners of ruin. *

In this crisis the chiefs were called together, and promptly commanded by the king to institute a rigid search in every part of the city, with the assistance of the soldiers of the Tonatiuh.

By this means, it was hoped the speedy discovery of the suspicious intruder would be effected; an object rendered still more urgent by the knowledge of his character and intentions, which the principal authorities obtained from their

foreign visitors, as soon as these circumstances became known.

The tall and stately form of the high-priest appears in the square of the Tianguetz; and as he moves along his ample and dishevelled locks are seen to wave, like a flowing mane, above the throng, the members of which fall back on either side, respectfully, to let him pass, and gaze after his receding figure, with mixed sensations of curiosity and awe.

Another individual passed also, along the track pursued by Tugal Tanub. He followed the astrologer with pertinacity, in his sinuous progress through the various groups, and into the crowded piazza, through the middle lane of which the latter took his way—without for a moment losing sight of his dark robe, or uncovered head; but, at the same time, neither in close proximity with the one he tracked, nor with an air of watchfulness about him—as such would have excited notice which it was the purpose of this person to avoid.

He was dressed in the loose blue tunic, crimson sash, and turban and leather boots of a merchant, over which was wrapped a large and sombre titmatli, or mantle of cotton; the latter screening the whole of the face in its folds, for he held it across his mouth as he went quietly on, like a sober inhabitant of the Tonatiuh quarter, as he seemed.

Yet who can tell the quality of the kernel by the rind? The habit was a mere disguise—the one who wore it—Sewantus-walie!

None would have supposed this to be the first visit of the Mohawk to the great Bazaar, so unconscious he appeared of the multitudinous attractions that surrounded him, as he passed between the long rows of stalls, in the wake of Tugal Tanub.

In vain the vendor of pulque presented his seductive cup with a deferential air: the confectioner his candied trifles, the cook his smoking pastry: the chocolate preparer his vanilla-spiced and frothy compound, thickened to the consistence of snow, which melted in the mouth, like dissolving foam. Sewantus went on, alike blind and deaf to the tempting baits, and the eager solicitations of their proprietors.

Many maidens also, ventured to call his attention to their fruit and flowers, and looked up into his eyes with a most beseeching smile. But though a glance at some of these young girls, with their unbound tresses and soft melancholy eyes, were worth more than all the ripe treasures that filled their baskets, Sewantus the warrior was not to be beguiled; for he was upon a war-path, and stuck to his purpose with the tenacity of a true Maqua. So, putting gently aside the offerings of

the nymphs, and gliding steadily on, he made the half circuit of the piazza, keeping a little distance in the rear of the priest, who now changed his course and, turning abruptly to the right, passed out from the latticed portico.

Crossing one of the numerous bridges that arched the canal, which, at this place, communicated directly with the adjoining lake, through a tunnel lined with stone: the High Priest threw a rapid and cautious glance around, stepped into a small canoe moored by the side of the canal, close to the wall of the enclosure: and seizing a paddle, darted fleetly away and disappeared from sight, under the triangular archway that ran under the terraced gardens of the palace.

Sewantus paused a moment, in strong embarrassment: he had not foreseen this. A short conference with his thoughts soon restored him to confidence however, and detaching, at their suggestion, and as secretly as possible, the fastening of one of the many piraguas, close by: he couched down within it, and plunging a paddle deep into the canal, with a few skilful movements of the blade propelled himself within the vaulted passage, where, secured from all fear of discovery, he made the light vessel shoot along, like a dolphin in the wake of the fin-winged prey.

The warm sunshine which burst around him as

he emerged from the archway into the lake, half blinded him for a time, but he soon observed the astrologer already far out from the shore, and heading in a straight line towards a temple situated among the groves on the opposite side.

Sewantus crept along by the foot of the terrace that lined the promontory, parallel with the course of the one he was pursuing, until a small island near the middle of the lake hid the priest from view; then he turned his prow boldly towards it and screened himself under its wooded verge until Tugal Tanub had reached the further shore and entered within the walled precincts of the teocalli before-mentioned.

Once assured of this, Sewantus also crossed, and drawing up the canoe secreted both it and his mantle in a thicket by the shore. Then under cover of the brushwood he stole noiselessly along until he reached the border of the neighbouring grove, when gliding rapidly on, he soon arrived at the high stone wall with which the grounds of the sacred edifice were enclosed. This he climbed by means of the huge serpents and other symbolic ornaments that were sculptured upon it.

Long and patiently he remained, prone upon its summit, and sweeping every part of the interior with his vigilant eyes, but without avail.

He saw only the great truncated pyramid, of a dazzling white, upon which the temple with its smoking altar was supported, at a lofty height. It rose in the midst of beautiful gardens and was more immediately environed by a quadrangular range of low buildings appropriated to the officiating priests and numerous servitors connected with the establishment.

An hour the watcher lay thus, upon the top of the wall like a lizard basking in the sun, and sweltering with the heat of noonday, without catching a further glimpse of the tall personage who had evidently excited his suspicions.

At length to his delight, a small wicket leading into the gardens from a back issue of one of the buildings was softly unclosed, and in came Tugal Tanub and another person who was a stranger to the Mohawk. Nevertheless the latter lowered himself into the garden by the aid of a friendly branch that stretched itself within reach of his arm, and crawling noiselessly among the shrubs and flowers he planted himself close to the border of a shaded alley through which he observed the pair to take their way. Nor was he disappointed, for they passed soon after within a few paces of his retreat, the astrologer speaking in low and earnest tones to his companion: not in the language of Lahunzel but in the prairie dialect of the Dahcota.

What he said Sewantus could not overhear, but he intersected their route a second time and the twain passed close beside the aloe under which he was concealed. He was more fortunate on this occasion, for he caught the sound of three simple words energetically expressed, which bore to him a most important signification, one that sent a thrill of apprehension to his friendly heart, and which the appearance of the high-priest's associate only tended to increase: for although he had never seen him, he was too familiar by description, with the features of Bizon-ko-kok-has to doubt for a moment that the crafty Abenake was then before him.

Sewantus remained motionless and abstracted for some time after the two were out of sight, turning over in his mind the reflections that arose in connection with what he had heard.

This as we have said was comprised in three plain words—"disguise, banquet, wine," which foreboded he believed nothing innocent or convivial in the mouth of the ascetic speaker, when used in close conference with his evil-minded and unlawful guest.

The very knowledge that the high-priest was harbouring in secret the proscribed and dangerous being who had pursued them with bloody intent to the very heart of the mountain retreat, was

sufficient to announce to him the existence of a plot inimical to his beloved friends at the least, if not to the State itself. "Disguise, banquet, wine!" As the ominous words flitted across his mind, his imagination found little difficulty in filling up the hiatus between them, until the Mohawk believed that he had fathomed the entire scheme with which they were interwoven; and with this belief he hugged to himself the prospect of a speedy triumph, for he possessed now, as he conceived, the means of circumventing the designs of the conspirators, and inveigling them into their own snare.

Resolving with himself to breathe not a single syllable to any one of his discovery, he regained the shore, and launching his piragua made his way back to the Tianguetz before it had been missed by its owner.

He strolled once more, but leisurely, through the still crowded piazzas, and this time he had an eye for each one of the attractive wonders contained in the busy mart which he was forced to slight on the former occasion.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PRIESTLY CONSPIRATOR AND HIS MIDNIGHT SOLILOQUY.

THE great disc of the central tower pealed forth the midnight summons to prayer, which vibrated in solemn harmony over the slumbering valley, now devoid of all other sounds, in its hour of most profound repose.

Many an ear, startled at the sacred call, roused the slumberer from his dreams and bade him address a short appeal to the Eternal, for the sake of that solemn part of him that never slept and would never die, ere he sank again upon his pillow, and the brief sound ceased.

But one watcher there was who caught these ringing tones with an abrupt and startling distinctness that wrought no soothing effect upon the strife within his bosom. Tugal Tanúb, the high-priest, like a shape accursed, strode fiercely

along in the starlight, endeavouring though vainly, to cool his throbbing brow in the night air, while he paced the upper terrace of the temple opposite the city.

Elevated high above the level of the surrounding vale, its whole extent was open to his view, and beyond the lake that lay in its unrippled calm beneath like a plain of steel, the numerous altar-fires of the *teocallis* revealed in dim outline the structures around their base; while over all was spread the grey and starry sky which appeared to rest like a vast opal dome upon the top of the mountain walls that shut in the entire circumference of the valley.

Now the meditation upon which the solemn appeal broke so suddenly must have been absorbing indeed, for he, the arch-minister and impersonation of his country's faith, made no obeisance nor moved his lips in prayer!

Let us pause awhile to scrutinize the character and purposes of this man.

Belonging to a respectable but not distinguished family of the *Monosekos* division, and educated for the priesthood, he soon obtained particular notice by his rapid attainments in astrology together with the evidences he gave of remarkable intellectual power.

Possessed of a mind, subtle and comprehensive,

he quickly mastered the entire course prescribed by the collegiate institutions of the city, yet not content with this, his thirst for knowledge led him through every branch of science cultivated by his people. Botany was a favourite study of the young priest, and as this was pursued by the Lahunzels with an ardour unknown elsewhere, at that period, he derived from it no inconsiderable knowledge of the properties of herbs and roots which he applied medicinally to stop the progress of disease, and with marked success. This increased his fame and assisted him in his ascent of the ladder of priestly preferment to the summit of which his ambition impelled him to attain. He was gradually acquiring that tacit supremacy over his competitors so grateful to the youthful aspirant and so prophetic of future success—the supremacy of mind.

Fired by the rapture of a poetic fancy, like the Grecian bards, he had woven into a system the floating and fragmentary legends connected with the popular belief in the existence of lesser gods or controlling influences inferior to the divinity of fire, but superior to man.

Then it was, when, with the impulse of a bold enthusiasm, he threw himself along the track of that ideal realm, and hovering in the inspiration of his spirit over the wild chaos, gave proportion to

each element and coherence to the whole scheme; that he became fully conscious of the potency of the spell within him, which, with life, gave him communion with the things beyond. And yet the very power that enabled him to remodel and beautify the mystical allegories of his race, taught him the true insignificance of a creed which could yield to fiction that which had been sanctioned by immemorial tradition.

Could he, the gifted revealer of the divine law, the keen reader of the starry prophecies whose genius had embraced the universe and pierced the depths of human wisdom, could he bow down to the work of his own hands? Surely the deity who was alone most worthy of his homage could not thus subserve the caprices of a mortal will.

Then in the drear dejection of this thought, dimly hovering on the verge of his mental horizon appeared a glorious shape, vast, intangible, and serene, like a great reflection of himself that had dominion over him—incomprehensible and vague, but in its veiled sublimity ever there to haunt and awe him down. It was the same far-shining image of the Supreme Being which Nezahualcoyotl contemplated when, dissatisfied with the superstition of Tezcuco, he erected a temple, like the Athenians, in honour of the Unknown God—the Cause of Causes.

At this time the King of Lahunzel died, and Unicum, who then held the office of high priest, was chosen as his successor; when as the most distinguished of the sacerdotal order Tugal Tanub obtained the vacant directorship, and found himself thus elevated to a station only inferior to that of the sovereign himself, ere he had reached middle age.

Now it was that he began to shape forth the grand conception that had been maturing in his mind, and to instill into the people the doctrines of a faith superior even to the astral worship of the ancient Ulmees, at the same time denouncing the growing polytheism which threatened to destroy all discrimination and simplicity in their religion, and to involve them in the barbarous usages of the Aztecs, which they had ever been anxious to avoid.

This he enforced with a subtleness of reasoning and a warm energy of expression that eat their way like a torrent of fiery lava into the hearts of his hearers, and made converts of them all.

In promulgating these new tenets the high-priest found a powerful auxiliary in his predecessor Unicum, a man of a noble disposition, superior both to prejudice and superstition. Under his auspices, the temple, so often alluded to, was soon afterwards built, and the people were forbidden to make offerings at any shrine save those to the prin-

ciple of fire which was announced as the fittest emblem of an all-sustaining deity to whom every other was subordinate or merely an agency of the supreme will, without life or form.

The simple religion of their forefathers was thus restored to the descendants of the wise races that first occupied the valley of Mexico; the adoration of the heavenly bodies in the semblance of fire which was considered an emanation from those orbs whose unequalled splendour and solemn march through the sky, ever since the birth of man has excited his veneration and awe.

But though the Chaldean-like philosophy of the Ulmees and Toltecos was revived, and many a flaming altar, as it threw its radiance over the valley, proclaimed the supremacy of a faith, in its simplest form, superior to idolatry and only second to a definite theism; it did not satisfy Tugal Tanub. It was but preparatory to that nobler triumph to which it would seem to lead.

He was still engrossed by the vision that in an hour of passionate reflection first loomed up to cheer and yet to mock his intellectual progress and overshadow his soul with its power. Another Zoroaster, he conceived a twin abstraction of good and evil, opposite influences analogous to light and darkness, and subject to an independent law. Here he halted, incapable of moving a step be-

yond, though that step would yield him the full revelation of his vast and vague ideal—the Master—Unit—the true God.

Yet after all, this was an interest less of the heart than of the brain of the astrologer-priest, who, apart from the scruples of a fastidious taste, cared little about the character of a devotional system as long as he could gain his ends.

He was unscrupulous and exacting: a tyrant formed to grind beneath his heel every obstacle to his sovereign control; one of that audacious breed who condemn alike moral right and mortal dictation, and in the spirit of Lucifer himself, would rather rule in hell than bow the knee in heaven.

If hitherto he had concealed these unsightly traits, it was because his career had been commensurate with his expectations. No opposition had called into play the secret fangs of the monster who showed himself in such imposing hues that the feeble sense was dazzled and subdued. The sway he obtained was a dangerous one for such a man to hold over the capacities of the crowd, whose honest convictions he had taken care neither to outrage or alarm during his innovations upon the established creed.

Then occurred the dream of Orazin which the high-priest strove to veil in the mysticism of an

allegory; alarmed at the approach of one foretold by an ancient prophecy to be a spiritual ruler in the land—which it seemed to imply. But in this instance, a time-honored oracle proved superior to the opinion of the greatest of the soothsaying priesthood, and the literal acceptance and fulfilment of the Cacique's dream was as the tread of a foe upon the serpent that slept coiled in the heart of Tugal Tanub.

Would he consent to yield his sceptre to this gifted stranger or share his proud prerogative with another? Rather than that, he felt that he could return to the darkest era of paganism, tear with his own hand the heart from the shrieking victim, and see every shrine in Lahunzel bathed in the blood of human sacrifice.

But in the form of a lovely, ingenuous, and shrinking woman, he strove in vain to identify the rival his imagination had portrayed, and Ellen's arrival was an era in his life which obliterated all previous impressions.

A new dream filled the heart and the brain of the astrologer, a dream more glorious than had ever yet engaged his fancy, or unfolded itself to him from the concurrence of symbol and star: one worthier the romance of his youth, when the affections were alive, and the imagination a phrenzy, than his austere manhood, whose cold abstraction

had reduced instinct to thought, and done for ever, as he believed, with sympathy and sexual passion.

He would win the favour of this bright creature, whom both reason and feeling convinced him to be no celestial visitant but a mortal like himself, of a superior race indeed, yet possessed of similar desires. He, Tugal Tanub, would espouse her, and by this act secure both the supremacy of his spiritual rule and the society of one gifted above every other female he had seen. Neither was this design opposed to the rules of his order, which did not exact celibacy from its members, or debar them from the enjoyments of domestic life.

But ere he had an opportunity of testing even the feasibility of his scheme, it was crushed into a hideous ruin by the arrival of Conrad, whom Tugal Tanub saw, with the acuteness of jealous hate, had already secured the prize.

The bright delusion fell from his eyes and faded like a fond delirium from his heart; yet he relapsed not again into his former insusceptibility and rest, but brooded in sullen musings, lashed by the sharp scourge of mortified passion, over the wreck of his desires. All that was fierce and evil in his nature was aroused into action, and ready to unite in support of his wounded pride, and he only waited for a favourable opportunity, now, to hurl his shafts with the fury of the subtle

lightning, at the audacious intruder who had brought confusion to his plans by forestalling him in the affections of the pale-faced virgin.

At this juncture it was, that the parent of mischief threw in his way the Abenake sorcerer, who was better suited to become a congenial instrument in his hands than the open and noble-minded Mohawk—whom he had found too shrewdly cautious and inflexible in his opinions, at their first interview, to justify any further attempts to make him subservient to his views.

Passing one evening at dusk, through a remote suburb of the city, he apprehended a man in the act of pilfering from a basket of maize bread, that chanced to be left in the street while its owner was engaged in the vicinity. The thief no sooner felt the powerful grasp of the priest, than he turned fiercely upon him, with an imprecation, in Dahcota; and muttering disjointed words in the same language, which his opponent knew, strove with tooth and claw to tear himself from his grasp.

But when he found himself impotent to struggle against the force of the gigantic priest, he changed his tactics and essayed the power of entreaty; pleading starvation as an excuse for the commission of a crime proverbially rare in Lahunzel.

This, together with the abject and cadaverous

appearance of the man, and the extraordinary fact that he was not only a stranger to him who knew every face in the valley, but spoke entirely in a foreign language—excited the curiosity, no less than the compassion of Tugal Tanub, who took him by an unfrequented route to a neighbouring teocalli, where, entering privately, he supplied him with food and afterwards drew from him by dint of artifice, threats and promises of protection, his entire history, with every particular connected with his entrance into the valley, and his subsequent difficulties from ignorance of the language and want of food; together with his unabated desire to avenge the abduction of his female captive.

The High-priest was astounded at this accidental concurrence with his own plans, as well as by the audacity of the man who had thwarted the vigilance of the sentinels; and penetrated singly into the heart of their secret hold: and he beheld in him a valuable auxiliary by whose aid he might accomplish, after all, his sinister purpose, by feigning to promote interests so closely connected with his own.

The sorcerer was in the power of one, his equal in craftiness and determination, and his superior in every other respect. As may be foreseen, therefore, he became a willing dupe, and readily entered into the plot his master subsequently suggested as

the best mode of obtaining revenge, and a sure triumph over his enemies. The better to mature his project, and preserve the incognito of his accomplice, Tugal Tanub resolved to remove him to a favourite resort by the lake, where he usually resided when not engaged in the city: and while so occupied it was, that, all unconscious of the dangerous exposure, they were observed by Conrad and his companions.

This it will be remembered, was the evening before the day when the first news was circulated relative to the death of the merchant and the supposed intrusion of a foreign spy, in his garb. Tugal Tanub, now saw the eminent hazard of the transaction in which he was involved. By harbouring the alien, he was incurring the risk of losing not only reputation but life itself, as a traitor to his country. It was too late to recede then, however, the step he had taken could never be retrieved; his only chance was to push on and leave destiny to decide whether he was to succeed or perish, in the end.

Thus environed by the most deadly peril, and throbbing with conflicting emotions, well might he spurn the matted couch, and seek the cool night breeze on the summit of the isolated teocalli. With every feeling warped by the dark infatuation which had gained dominion over him, and

absorbed in an unholy revery of passion and pre-meditated crime; no wonder was it that he let the midnight summons fall unheeded on his ear, and preserved, as the sound swept by, a haughty and contemptuous look, which had in it more of malice than of piety, of scornful defiance than homage.

"Cleave as thou wilt the stagnant air, thou noisy babbler," he soliloquised; "Why should Tugal Tanub, obey thy stupid clangour, fitted, as it is, but to stir the heavy faculties of yon slumbering crowd?"

"He has his own seasons and forms, and fashions of living. As in thought, so in action, will he be ever free and unrestricted by the slavery of common rule. These very mountain walls do sometimes appear as a tightened girdle unto him, and make him gasp for freer air. His spirit is not like the servile clay that fashions itself to each caprice of a child. By the soul of his ancestors, he will stand alone! None shall drag down the wisest of the Ulmecks to their own bondage; for Tugal Tanub is not of them!"

And as he stalked impetuously along the paved terrace with stern and threatening gestures, he seemed to crush and sweep from around him the the airy offspring of his suppositions.

All at once, he stood perfectly still and shivered with a violent ague. "Fear!" he muttered, "and

what should I fear? Am I not strong of arm and cunning as the mightiest; have I not wealth, power, and vigour?

“Have the stars refused me, their chosen interpreter, aught that I have ever asked them? It were strange, in very sooth, should they forsake me now, when I have rescued their worship from the meshes of an ignoble idolatry, and surrounded their altars with the oblations of the Lahunzels.

“Away, forboding accursed! Fortune is to the strong, and by the sovereignty of my red right hand! I will fight and triumph: ay though death itself doth touch my shoulder like a familiar, and hiss—beware!

“To-morrow is noted in the calendar wheel, as a day of sudden deaths: the decree has gone forth for unnumbered ages, and yet will it accomplish itself to-morrow, surely as the heart beats with the living fire: for be he but firm and faithful, hideous wretch as he is, that wizard juggler—and the venom of the music-serpent’s tooth does not its work more subtilly than that deadly juice. And nevertheless, the flower that fed upon it was marvelously made, and innocent looking to the eye, almost as her—the virgin of the prophecy, the starry-face stranger who has wrought this madness in my blood and brain.

“O! ye invisible essences that float in the airy

void: ye servants of the great Everywhere and Eternal! Dread immortal serpent that embraces destiny in thy mighty ring, and even now, art closing the annals of appointed time—cycle-type of the Everlasting, that will be, when this glorious firmament and green and living world shall have dissolved away; grant me some omen or potent spell, with which to stifle this unconquerable fever that girds my faculties with a chain of fire: which enrages, torments, and must consume!

“Slake it Huitzilopotchli,* the fury armed; and Chalchivitlecue† thou mighty mother and purifier! If ye do exist, in very sooth; and the faith of the Mexitli is not a lie.

“Would, O would that the hour of trial were arrived! uncertainty and delay are not for such as Tugal Tanub. His temper is a knife of copper that use brightens, and neglect corrodes!

“I would grasp the peril now, and cleave it with a warrior’s joy; but this tortoise-like crawl of fate to the forthcoming, sickens me.

“As a stringed javelin to the hand that launches it, my venomous thoughts are dragged back, fruitless and immature.

“Inexorable and sluggish time, canst thou not

* The god of war.

† The goddess of water, in whose name the children of the Mexicans were baptized.

march faster in the track of my desires? Rush on! Rush on!

This train of vehement meditation was here suspended, abruptly, as a beautiful meteor, describing a fiery arc in the sky, burst with a loud report into three parts, and diffused for an instant, throughout the valley, a splendour equal to that of noon day, ere the glittering fragments dropped and were quenched in the lake.

“A sign! A prophecy! Eternal honour to the starry host, they have not forsaken their votary!” cried the priestly soothsayer, who hailed the phenomenon as a portent of success; and with his mind partially relieved, he descended thoughtfully from his lofty promenade, to court a brief repose ere the period arrived when he was to take the irrevocable plunge in the vortex of deadliest crime.

It was strange that he should have drawn a favourable augury from the disrupture of a star!

CHAPTER IX.

A ROYAL BANQUET.

IT was a vast hall in the royal palace, lined with a fine coating of plaster covered in every part with painted imagery, and festooned along the cornice with a splendid hanging of feather-work fringed with gold.

The ceiling was of carved cedar inlaid with various rare woods, the floor covered with a fine matting of a chequered design, and down the centre ran a long table loaded with viands and massive plate, and surrounded with guests, at the head of which presided Unicum, the king; while ranged near the painted wall on either side, stood a row of bronze statues, each with a lighted torch of resinous pine in its uplifted hand. It was the first grand festival which had taken place since the arrival of the strangers, and all that was

costly and beautiful, and noble in the land had been called into requisition, to do them honour.

It was a royal banquet truly, in every sense of the word, and one that would not have been amiss in the most fastidious court in Europe at that period. There were the grand solids, consisting of a great variety of fish, flesh, and fowl, among which may be mentioned the choice parts of the domesticated bison, and the enormous aboriginal turkey, all served upon chaffing-dishes of massive gold. These were flanked by innumerable smaller compounds of meats and vegetables, elaborated with the nicest skill of the cuisine: together with sauces and condiments suited to stimulate a languid or jaded palate.

These again, were succeeded by pastry, fruit, sweetmeats, and cold chocolate foam, flavoured with spices and contained in large goblets of carved tortoise-shell or gold, of which precious metal every utensil upon the board was fabricated, with a few exceptions; for the plates for the use of the guests were of fine glazed earthenware embellished with coloured flowers, and at intervals, above the more conspicuous dishes, appeared an elegant vase, filled with odoriferous flowers, each of a different pattern but all of the most costly workmanship, and blazing as it were, in the torch light, with a curious incrustation of

jewels and arabesques of interwoven silver and gold.

The table, as the saying is, fairly groaned with the weight of the precious metals—a statement which may appear unwarrantable in a fiction that lays claim to historical veracity, and the proprieties of what are technically termed—costume. But the scepticism of the reader will vanish when he is informed that almost every other grain in the sand of the valley lake was a grain of gold; that every torrent in those mountains washed down with them a similar freight to the plains; that in fine, it was within the precincts of that vast placer deposit, the long dreamt of Dorado of the western world, which, destined to remain hidden from the cupidity of the white men for another century and a half, even while we write, is revealing on the banks of the Sacramento, its glittering hoards to the Anglo-Americans, who have marched in their turn as conquerors, over the track of Cortes and into the city of the Montezumas, and wrenched from the degenerate offspring of the Castilians the gold-sown regions of California.

It was a scene of splendour and luxurious pomp only now to be realized in an oriental land or in some fairy legend; a display of wealth and ornament unsuited to the austerity of our north-

ern life, where utility supplants decoration, and where the difficulty of obtaining even the necessities of life makes us chary of superfluous expenditure.

The caciques and nobles who with their wives and daughters attended the festival, were dressed in their choicest array, and presented a gorgeous assemblage of colours; and on every tunic, mantle, and robe were to be seen the flash of jewels and rich embroidery.

The chiefs wore fillets of gold round their heads, containing waving plumes, and many of them, besides long ear-rings, had a jewelled ornament depending from the nose or under-lip, a monstrous fashion; while the ladies bore entwined strung-pearls and flowers with the meshes of their dark hair, which had a very chaste effect, and harmonized charmingly with their amber complexions and soft pensive eyes.

But the rarest and most admired ornament of the radiant throng, a master-piece of art, was the copilli or crown which the king himself wore. This was in the form of a wreath of flowers, each being cut entirely out of a single emerald and set in gold, while the pistils were of diamond, pearl, turquoise, and other gems: proving the sufficiency of other tools besides steel to work the hardest substances, as well as the extreme taste and skillfulness of the artizans of the valley.

Ellen was there, looking more lustrous and spirit-like in her beauty, to the eyes of the Lahunzels, than any being they had ever seen before, though she preserved her usual simplicity of dress and wore no gems; for the fairest Indian lady at the feast, and some were of no common stamp, suffered eclipse beside her. So thought Conrad, as after ranging around the brilliant but dusky circle, his eye rested upon his betrothed. Each one of the party, in fact, gazed with obvious admiration at her white and dazzling complexion, and while they looked from Ellen to the florid and fair-haired German who sat near her, the people of that solitary world were assured that they were of a race superior to themselves: one on whom the gods had lavished their choicest favours. Indeed they were half inclined to think that the very attributes of the immortals themselves were the characteristics of a physical type so exalted and peculiar.

Sewantus was there in the costume of a warrior, calm, dignified, and noble, yet watchful of every countenance, and suspicious of each movement that took place among the numerous attendants who occupied the space between the guests and the bronze torch-bearers of the banquet hall. And there also sat Tugal Tanub in his sombre garb, with a garland of flowers, white and lily-

like, around his brow, and on his lip a smile of revelry that seemed out of place in one whose temperament was so austere and grave.

The laugh and jest went round in lively accord meanwhile, and the conversation became more general and unrestrained after the viands were removed, and ewers and fine napkins carried to each individual for the purpose of ablution, an act religiously observed; for they were all of them more or less under the influence of the inspiring pulque which, together with lighter beverages made of the juice of the aloe, acid, and sugar, and preferred by the gentler sex, were carried round by servitors, in silver flagons and poured into the cups of emerald and chased gold ranged along the cloth, and never permitted for a moment to become dry; while every male, from the king to the lowest in degree rolled up from his lips fragrant clouds, inhaled through jewelled pipes, charged with perfumed tobacco mingled with liquid amber*. Some of the ladies also, with their little segarets, added to the scented stream that filled the chamber, a worthy ovation to the social god who seemed to preside over the entertainment.

At a signal of the king, a party of jugglers entered the banquet hall, masked and habited in

* The balsam of the sweet gum tree.

the most grotesque fashion. These amused the company for some time, with their feats of agility and legerdemain, which would not have brought discredit to the most famous conjurers of India and China, and excited no little, the astonishment of the foreigners. At length Unicum waved his hand, and the professors of manual dexterity left off their exhibition, and mingling with the throng of domestics, assisted in giving circulation to the cheering wines.

The king turned to Ellen who sat in the place of highest honor, on his right, and said with a courteous smile; "Have ye need, divine stranger, in that far land of which ye spake, to call forth your more joyous feelings with the aid of juices; or do ye possess the faculty of raising the heart to the level of the festive hour in laughter and brisk imaginings, at thy mere will?"

Unicum spoke in Dahcota, to which, out of respect to the strangers, all at that end of the table confined themselves.

"Alas no, my father," replied Ellen; "It is not given to any of us to master what I do believe to be the failing of all created souls,—the unfitness of the mortal part to do that which the spirit wills. Like thee, my father, we are oft-times cast down when we would be glad, and slow of fancy, when we would be sprightly and pleasant-tongued.

"We likewise have discreet resort to the social bowl; for it enlivens the heart."

"What?" rejoined Unicum with surprise;—does the Maguey take root and flourish in that distant land?

"Not so," replied Conrad, taking up the conversation; "we have the fruit of the grape-vine instead; its rich juices supply our tables with such sparkling drafts as would rejoice thy very soul to behold, O king! They glow like molten gems in our goblets and inspire us with unearthly raptures."

"The rapture of strong drink is an agreeable madness, in very sooth," observed Tugal Tanub, glancing askant at the speaker, with his peculiar smile. "Were life ever so it would be sacrilege to die. The glory of the hereafter is fore-imaged in the reveries of the cup."

"Not to the fall," remarked Tazinco the Tecuh-tle, in his quiet way; "there are two spiders ever lurking at the bottom—satiety and disease. There are no webs or hidden perils in the star-mansions, to trouble the winged reveller."

"Aptly spoken!" exclaimed Unicum with a mirthful sally. "Our uncle has not lost the spice of his remarks, I perceive. He is, like the water of a salt lake, which as travellers say, increases in sharpness the older it becomes."

“Or like the hawk that hovers over it,” remarked Orazin; “and sees further into its depths than any other bird.”

“It is a creature of prey,” said the high-priest, disparagingly—and therefore it cannot detect a charm in that which yields no tribute to its maw.”

“Let us do openly and without reproach what is expected of us,” suggested Sewantus; “the ways of no two men are exactly the same. What I hate most is a fox with the face of an owl!”

The high-priest felt startled at the hidden satire which these last words conveyed to his conscious ear alone:—could the stranger suspect him of hypocrisy or a sinister design? He resolved to watch him more closely for the future; he did not like the cool tranquillity of the Mohawk, particularly when he addressed *him*. Something told Tugal Tanub that the bold foreigner was weaving an obstruction in his path.—Sewantus beware!

“After all, my children, said Unicum, holding up his emerald cup charged to the brim, and wishing to change a subject which began to throw a shade of gravity over the circle unsuited to the time: after all, ye must confess that this life of ours would be a duller thing, and less kindly perchance, without the maguey wine.

“All honor to it; for moderately made use of,

it helps us wonderfully along, above all we of the 'frosty time,' who have scarcely warmth enough left to melt away the snow flakes in our hair; *extinguished volcanoes as we are!*

"Ah! that reminds me of what I had else forgotten, I do believe; that ode of thine, Gautama, prepared in the strange tongue for the edification of our honoured guests, as you strove to impress upon me, erewhile. Now will we give ear to the rehearsing of it for, as I live, it pleaseth me."

The fortunate individual thus called upon, rose up in quick obedience to the royal wish, and with a moist and flushed countenance made the usual salutation of homage, after which, drawing a small book from the folds of his dress, he recited the following, in a somewhat diffident manner; for he was a young noble of a literary turn, who had been recently elevated to the dignity of royal Bard, and his honours still sat rather oppressively upon him.

ODE TO THE MAGUEY.*

"The gold shines amid the sands of the valley, like notes in the sun-inwoven air.

"There are soft pearls locked up under the great waters. The diamond and emerald lie concealed in the bowels of the mountains. Yet what are these?"

* The great American Aloe (*Agave Americana*) or Maguey, as the natives term it, served as many important uses among the

“They cannot give food to the hungry or clothe the naked; neither can it be said that they afford shelter from the damps of heaven, or cheerfulness to a heart distressed.

“Thou, my choice treasure, my incomparable gem: Thou queenly Magney art more excellent than the pearl of the sea, more precious than the glittering harvest of the mine; since all this and more, of thine own accord, thou givest unto me!

“When the fire of life burns low in the breast of age,—that frosty time. When the riches and glory of the world suffice not. When the shades of the sepulchre are gathering about thy gloomy way, and thou art weary, and forlorn, and solitary; what friend will offer himself as a staff on which to lean, and give thee a new youth, like the Magney—with its generous blood?

“A gold cup, though it be of the rarest workmanship, is of little worth without the wine. As the spirit to the body, so is the pulque to the tankard; its crowning jewel—its soul!

Mexicans, as the Papyrus did with the Egyptians, to which plant it bore a curious analogy in the particular uses to which it was applied. Paper, superior to the best parchment, was made from its bruised leaves, thread of which a coarse cloth was woven, from its fine, as likewise strong ropes of its toughest twisted fibres. Pins and needles were supplied by the thorns on its leaves; pulque, a seductive inebriating drink, was obtained from its fermented juice; a palatable and nourishing food from its boiled roots; while its leaves furnished, besides, a serviceable thatch for the dwellings of the humbler classes; and from the fine thread of the pita, a variety, was manufactured a delicate web, much esteemed for veils and other articles of a lady's dress. “In short,” says an accomplished historian, “the Magney was meat, drink, clothing and writing materials for the Aztecs.”

"Life is the huitzitzilin* that flashes an instant among the flowers and is gone. Death is the xopilote† whose talons reach the vitals, in defiance of breast-plate and shield.

"O, beautiful and best child of the sunbeam! teach us thy lore, that when we go to Him by whom we live, and to the living are but as the memory of a word once spoken, we may bequeath to them a useful heritage: like thee, thou flower-plumed sovereign.

"When I behold the inconstancy of fortune, I feel no disquietude about earthly things. What are the pomp and grandeur of kings, the ambition of the proudest nations, but an empty pageantry that crumbles into oblivion and dust: a bubble in the track of time!

"In thee we possess a nobler and a surer trust. In thy virtue there is no mutation, in thy favour no hidden perfidy. Let us guard with our gratitude, and crown with eternal honour, the queenly plant; our staunch friend—our Maguey!

Humming bird

† Vulture.

CHAPTER X.

A CATASTROPHE.

“ Well done, Gautama,” said Unicum, in earnest approval, “ Thou hast a fancy, and can discriminate; by the head of the Monosekos, there is in thy song a morality which a crowned king may reflect upon to his advantage.

“ And yet is Unicum loath to believe that his estate is not to be envied, when he has such a faculty as thine to give zest to his feasting, and the prerogative of rewarding it.” And taking from the table his drinking cup—a costly utensil, formed of a single emerald, and supported on feet of gold, he handed it to an attendant and bade him give it to the reciter of the ode, saying aloud ;

“ Receive it, noble Gautama, and may the spirit of the Maguey which thou quaffest from its brim, impart its brightest fervour to thy poet

fancies, and to thy heart the "verdure of spring time," which is typified by the hue of the gem."

A simultaneous burst of applause responded to the generous sentiment, and testified the general approval of the act it accompanied; and the youthful bard resumed his seat with the sensations of one who has passed an awful crisis, and secured a portion of that popularity for which so many sacrifice life's best gifts in vain.

"Would that I had aught to add to thy guerdon, O my father, besides my true thanks," said Ellen in a low voice to the king: "'Tis the offering of the humble but, it may be, that the poet will not deem them on that account the less worthy."

"They are dearer than tongue can tell; to Gautama," said the sensitive bard, to whom the observation was faithfully transferred; adding with embarrassment:—

"Yet is he covetous and importunate notwithstanding. If he might speak, then would he say, the lady with the sunny countenance has that to grant which, of little value to her, would yet repay a more deserving strain."

"Name it," said Ellen quickly.

"The flower in thy hair."

With a *naïve* grace she immediately detached the ornament from the silky plait to which it was

fastened, and bowing with a blushing cheek, complied with the poet's wish by placing it in his hand.

The action, together with the sparkling glance that accompanied it, were never forgotten by the simple child of song; and long after, when the cherished gift had become but a sorry emblem of one so fresh and fair, he would inhale the fragrance that lingered in the withered leaves, and muse for hours in some quiet nook, spinning wild fantasies in his busy brain, and holding commune with a bright ideal not unlike the giver of the flower.

"Keep up the social flame, my children," said the king, in the pause that succeeded; "drain every one of you his half-empty cup, that it be replenished to the brim. Time wanes, and we have our festive garlands on; let us be worthy of them!"

The exhortation was quickly attended to, and a universal movement took place among the servitors, who hurried from guest to guest with their ready pulque jars, which seemed to offer a fertility of supply that no demands could exhaust.

Sewantus-walie had cast an eye upon one of these Ganymedes of the feast, a masked juggler—who appeared to hover somewhat pertinaciously about the upper part of the table, to the evident annoyance of the officers of the royal household:

who claimed that station as exclusively their own by virtue of their rank, which was far above that of the common menials, from whom they kept entirely aloof during the entertainment.

Once or twice, the warrior thought he could detect evidences of a secret understanding between this individual and the high-priest, who sat at a short distance below; for after each glance, in that direction, the mask made a movement which brought him more opposite his own position, and ever closer to the back of Conrad's seat. He observed also, that he eyed the cup of the latter curiously, but by stealth, as if on the watch to refill it from a flagon which he held

He had failed once already in the attempt, being forestalled by one of the royal servitors, who, with no gentle action, thrust himself before the intruder, and secured the contested honour.

Now, however, there was no impediment in his way; for in the general call of—"flagons and jars! flagons and jars, ho!" that succeeded, the masked assistant was forgotten, and, in an instant, Conrad's cup sparkled to the brim with a fresh potation, and he raised it mechanically to his lips.

The conference in the garden of the temple, with the ominous words he had overheard, flashed like an inspiration upon the mind of the Mohawk,

who had been watching the whole proceeding, as a panther ready for the spring.

"Disguise—banquet—wine," he repeated to himself, catching up a massive goblet with the speed of thought: and ere it reached the mouth of his friend, the suspected draught was dispersed upon the floor, and the crystal vessel that contained it, shivered into fragments by the force of a well-aimed blow.

Then with a wild war-cry the Indian bounded over the table and seized the astounded juggler, who, before he could move a finger in his defence, found himself unmasked before the whole assembly.

Well might his assurance desert him and his limbs quiver with dread, as all eyes were turned upon him, and Ellen, with a shriek, sank fainting into the arms of Unicum. It was the proscribed spy and assassin,—the vengeance goaded Bizon-ko-kok-has!

"Confess, dog!" cried Sewantus, holding his naked knife to the breast of his prisoner, and forcing him back to the wall. "Was there not poison in the cup? Speak the truth, else you die!"

"It was not Bizon-ko-kok-has that did it," replied the other wildly, and half unconscious of what he was saying, as he cowered abjectly

beneath the fierce look of his enemy :—" He was beguiled to kill the pale face. I tell no lie; there is another man at the root of this business."

" Who! Who!" demanded several of those present, in Dabecota, as they arose in confusion and crowded around the speaker with menacing looks.

" I cannot tell," was the reply; Bizon-ko-kok-has is not a fool. He is a medicine-man, and has done cunning things."

" The cunning of his whole tribe is as a spider's web to the Maquas. Listen, dog!" And Se-wantus whispered a few words in the prisoner's ear which made his small serpent orbs start almost out of their sockets, with amazement.

" Ha! ha!" he cried, with a maniacal laugh that sounded strange and unearthly to the ears of the revellers: "the Maquas are mighty strong. There is no way you can hide from them—the wizard bears! Come forth like a man, Tugal Tannb, and let us sing our death songs together: we have sold our scalps!"

" What mystery lurks in his words?"

" The man raves."

" Fear has deprived him of his understanding," exclaimed several of the guests.

" What has the high-priest to do with his foul attempt?" demanded the king, who had relin-

quished his fair charge to Conrad, and, moved with strong excitement, now came forward.

"More than ye can believe, O king!" answered Sewatlas, turning calmly to the questioner, and pointing to the individual thus alluded to, who still remained seated at the board, and met the damning imputation with a look of indignant scorn. "I, a stranger, accuse Tugal Tanub of treason to his country and a base design against the life of my white brother. If my words are false, let him stand up and prove them so to my face—I have said!"

The bold impeachment fell like a tale of horror upon the heart of every one in that crowded hall, and they fell back, aghast and speechless, from the side of the accused, who rose proudly up to his full height, like a lion disturbed, and shaking the long locks from his brow, attempted to speak.

At that moment the wild laugh of the prisoner rang again through the chamber, and overcame all other sounds. There was a something in its tone that sent a panic to the soul of the guilty priest; for his face turned ghastly white, and his lip quivered convulsively. He made a mighty effort to recover himself, but failed; and, haunted by the mocking accents of his accomplice, he was seized with utter despair, and strode furiously to

the door, striking down those in his way, and disappeared before any one could prevent his escape.

Confusion and uproar succeeded. The chiefs rushed out to collect the palace guard; the females were led, trembling, away; while Unicum, calling his chief councillors around him, departed to the hall of consultation, with the prisoner in charge of several trusty retainers of the Prince Orazin, who secured the detected spy, when he was delivered over to him by his captor.

In the meantime, many of the more zealous adherents of the high-priest clamoured loudly, in protestation of his innocence of the charge brought against him, and sallied out into the city to make known, everywhere, the extraordinary circumstance that had occurred.

Thus, in a little while, the banquet-hall was deserted, and left, with its sparkling treasures and trampled garlands, to the guardianship of the stern torch-bearers, who seemed to have caught a partial life from the wild commotion of the hour, and to work their features spasmodically beneath their flowery diadems; as, stirred by the draught, the lights flared to and fro, and their spectral ombres, played, in dismal pantomime, on the wall behind.

Ellen, supported by Conrad, and accompanied by Couscil and several of the lady-guests, left the palace soon after the scene of festivity became

converted into one of turmoil, and took refuge in a retired gallery or azotea, that ran along the side of the upper story of the palace, facing the lake, and was formed by the flat roof of the principal range.

Here they scattered themselves about in frightened groups, and caught with many a wild foreboding, the notes of alarm that arrived in subdued murmurs from the different quarters of the city.

The remembrance of the late event was also kept alive by the unusual brilliancy of the temple fires which were kindled into beacons of flame: and by the continual and melancholy boom of the tunkeel or great alarm-drum, that thundered from the tower of the palace, and spread the tidings of danger and warning to the furthest precincts of the valley.

All at once, however, the tranquillity of the lake beneath was singularly invaded. Around the promontory of the palace shot a small piragua, propelled by a single paddle with obvious haste; for the rolling waters in its track, catching the light from the city, gleamed behind it like a train of fire.

But now a shout, as of a multitude, awoke the echoes of the surrounding shores, and immediately afterwards, with flaming torches and savage cries, a crowd of other craft came also into view; each

CHAPTER XI.

SHOWS HOW THE PALE-FACES EMPLOYED THEMSELVES IN
LAHUNZEL.

SEVERAL days elapsed before the sensation, produced by the catastrophe just related, completely subsided.

When, however, the authorities had examined closely into the matter, they discovered sufficient to induce the people generally to believe that the conduct of their spiritual leader warranted the strongest doubts of his integrity, and fully exonerated them from seeming severity in a proceeding which had driven him to the awful alternative we have described. And even the staunchest of his supporters were fain, at last, to concur in the general opinion, that the fate of Tugal Tanub was wrought out, less by the agency of man than of that Omnipotent Being whose existence he had been the first to impress, however vaguely, upon their minds.

What contributed mainly to this view of the case, was the confession of the apprehended spy—as they chose to consider him—which was shortly promulgated by the royal command, throughout the valley, by means of placards, in the figurative writing, and oral proclamation by public officers, appointed for the purpose, through an especial ordinance of the king.

The shock which the Abenake sustained, on the night of his apprehension, brought on a return of his old complaint; and for some time afterwards no reliable detail of the dark scheme in which he had been engaged, could be obtained from his incoherent replies.

When, however, he became somewhat reconciled to a state of confinement, which at first, excited him to a pitch of uncontrollable frenzy, they were more successful with him.

And yet, with a mulish perversity and a sovereign independence of character which might have gained him credit in a better cause, he would yield nothing to intimidation; and only consented to enter into explanations with his captors, when, with shrewd tact and no little ingenuity, they affected to underrate his powers, and drew him on, by goading his self-conceit, until he furnished an entire narrative of his proceedings; from the moment when, maddened by disappointment and

rage, he set out in pursuit of his escaped captive, on the buffalo plains eastward of the mountains. From this it appeared that he had followed the course of Orazin, to the outskirts of the loftier range, where the clue was lost, when he continued to wander at random among the mazes of the defiles until his horse dropped from under him, from sheer fatigue. After this, he proceeded still onward till his naked feet were torn by the stones, when he chanced to stumble upon a track made by the mountain sheep, which led him along the glaciers, over the crest of the great barrier.

Directly after this it was, that he fell in with Conrad and his conductor at the rendezvous where they bivouacked, and was thus enabled to make his way to the secret entrance of the valley, by following clandestinely in their rear.

Their sudden disappearance there, although it puzzled him very much, did not cause him to relinquish the pursuit. His was that blood-hound pertinacity of intention that once lashed into keenness and put upon the scent, never ceases but with the grip of the offender.

Baffled, bleeding, half famished, but not subdued, he hung about the neighbourhood until the arrival of the returning traders, when accident gave a singular encouragement to his design.

Being unable to reach their destination ere

nightfall, the travellers encamped among the hills, and early on the ensuing morning proceeded on their way. Now it happened that one of the merchants was suffering severe pain, on account of a fracture in the lower jaw, from a fall received some time before; which induced him to delay his departure from the place of camping, until the caravan had moved on.

Mounting his horse at length, he proceeded leisurely up the defile, when all at once, with a sharp growl, a grizzly bear sprung from a neighbouring thicket, and fastened its terrible claws on the loins and thigh of the traveller.

Though taken unawares, and dreadfully torn, the man retained his presence of mind, and catching up a sword-mace or maquahuitl, that hung at his saddle-bow, he dashed it with all his might upon the head of the monster. Then his horse took fright and started off, and in an instant he was dragged from his seat to the ground, and struggling in the embrace of the bear.

Now Bizon-ko-kok-has, from his hiding place in the vicinity, had witnessed the incident: and, not a whit disinclined to profit by the misfortune of another, he gave chase to the frightened steed, which, once out of danger, began to crop the herbage, by the edge of the mountain stream.

The Medicine-man succeeded, with some diffi-

culty, in catching the animal, and vaulting upon its back, coolly retook his way to the scene of the fatal struggle; there he found the man already dead, and his ferocious adversary rolling about and tearing up the ground in mortal agony.

"Ho! ho!" chuckled the conjurer, and while he enjoyed the contortions of the wounded bear he formed his plan. Dismounting, he stripped off his tattered clothes, flung them into the torrent, replaced them with those of the dead merchant, wrapped his shawl round his face and thus transfigured into his likeness, took a grinning farewell of brum, and putting his horse to speed soon came up with the cavalcade, which he did not think proper to join just then however; so he remained in the rear, enjoying the contents of the dead man's wallet until the horn sounded, and with the declension of the water, the long file entered the mouth of the subterranean passage, when, mixing boldly with the rest, he escaped observation, and passed the guard at the portal.

But his subsequent bewilderment, upon finding himself in a crowded city, where he could only procure the necessaries of life by the merest stealth, and was forced to prowl about in disguise, an outlawed alien: gave a sorry turn to his prospects, until he fell in with the high priest, the consequences of which we have seen.

Conrad, accompanied by Sewantus and Prince Orazin, visited the prisoner for the purpose of endeavouring to mitigate the deadly animosity of the man, by showing that he bore him no personal grudge for the part he had played, in the conspiracy against his life; for, that his destruction was contemplated became fully obvious upon testing the quality of the liquid in the suspicious flagon, which being administered to a tame wolf, brought on a deadly languor without pain, and caused death in a few hours.

But the sorcerer was seized with fury at the sight of his former victim and his Mohawk antagonist, and spat out his anathemas at them both, with the malignancy of a wounded snake, until Conrad relinquished his design.

Yet he interceded in his behalf: and although death was the penalty adjudged by the tribunals, for the double crime of secret intrusion into the valley and an atrocious attempt upon the life of a guest; by dint of urgent entreaty with the king, Conrad succeeded in revoking the decree, and saved the life of his dangerous enemy. But although in this instance the point of a golden arrow was not drawn across the portrait of the condemned—the significant mode of affixing the sign manual of royal sanction to the judgments of the courts,—Unicum, nevertheless, would not

consent to the liberation of one who had it in his power to endanger the interests of his subjects to a grievous extent; and the wily culprit was accordingly consigned to imprisonment in a lonely cell, hollowed within the massive roof of the palace under the azotcas. There, sufficiently well cared for, and incapable of doing mischief, the good souls of Lahunzel hoped, as he had ample leisure to correct his eccentricities and repent of his misdeeds, he would become tamed down to a rational being.

Now it was that Ellen began to devote herself to the important purpose which had brought her to Lahunzel. For several hours, each day, surrounded by a chosen body of the priestho and the most learned of the scribes, she engaged in communicating, orally, those ^{shén} and doctrines of the Christian religion which she learned at her mother's knee, and still retained, with the tenacity of her childhood. So that, in default of any printed record of the sacred writings, she was able to impart to her eager neophytes, no unworthy knowledge of the principal elements of a faith of which they had never heard; and the simple and devout training of the sect to which she belonged, especially fitted Ellen for the task that now devolved upon her.

It was a remarkable scene indeed, to behold the

young maiden; her serious face, kindled up with a holy enthusiasm, as she announced to the grave elders of the people, the attributes and commandments of that master God whose existence had been suggested, but who was never revealed to them in a perfect shape, till now.

Who can fail to picture to himself the emotions that must have thrilled through those listeners, when with solemn tenderness the girl related the story of the man God, his remarkable birth and mission upon earth; how he lived as none before or since hath, and how he died? And when she repeated to them the precepts by which man was ordained, thenceforth, to govern his extensions and win the lost inheritance in the skies! *enclosure*, the stern, the powerful and the ambitious, learning are everywhere, and of each class—must they winced at a doctrine which enforced the virtue of humility, and gave them no preference beyond the poorest or most unfortunate of their fellow men! Yet, on the other hand, how would the obscure and lowly be lifted up and consoled!

Between the king and the bonds-man, the young and hoary-headed, the happy and afflicted, a new and closer alliance was promised, under the auspices of a spiritual brotherhood. Within the circle of a code that enjoined them to do to others as they would be done by, and to forgive their

enemies, seemed to be the summit of moral perfection, where each stood upon level ground.

Nor was Conrad idle during this period; for he aided Ellen in the good work, and helped to explain the exact meaning of her words to Tazincó,—by whom they were carefully interpreted, in the national language, to the painters of historical designs, and hieroglyphical symbols; who immediately recorded them, each in his separate mode, with the ready materials of his art.

In the intervals of leisure also, accompanied, sometimes by Ellen, and alternately, by the king, Orazin, or Tazincó: he visited every place of note, in the curious city in which he was: and when he had arrived at the end of his exploration left nothing with which to slake the thirst of inquiry. he found that the impression created, at his first entrance into this terra incognita, was not diminished in the least, upon a further acquaintance.

The royal palace, in itself, was well worth a long and particular study.

It has been stated already, that the great, triple terrace, upon which the pile itself stood, was approached from the city, by crossing two quadrangular courts or squares, surrounded by a range of buildings which, in the first instance, were appropriated to the purposes of a bazaar or grand

fair, held once, during the national week of five days.

The structures that lined the inner square were of a more massive and imposing character. These were extensive and uniform in design, the lower half presenting a row of columns in pairs, with a second series placed against the wall behind, having rows of lozenges sculptured in alto-relievo, and a range of doorways alternating between them along the whole front which they comprised. Above this, and resting on the outer columns, projected a heavy cornice and superstructure, covered from end to end with symbolic sculpture, and painted in a variety of colours. This edifice extended around three sides of the court which it enclosed, and was devoted to the institutes of learning, and the different offices connected with the transaction of public affairs.

There were held the sittings of the different courts of justice, and the grand councils* over which the king was accustomed to preside. Here

* The most remarkable of these was called the Council of Music—applying the term in that comprehensive sense which, as with the Greeks, “embraced the range of the fine arts and whatever entered into the service of the Muses.” This tribunal presided over every branch of science and art, and differed little from a similar institution founded by Nezahualcoyotl, the royal bard of Tezcuco—for a full account of which, see Prescott’s *Conquest of Mexico*, Vol. I, p. 153.

also were the higher schools of science and art, and the abodes of the chief professors, together with the repository of the public archives.

Poets, students, and statesmen met daily under the marble porticoes, and discoursed upon various topics; while the paved area in front was usually sprinkled over with groups of officers and men of rank connected with the royal household, or seeking an interview with the king. The extraordinary splendour of the spectacle may be conceived therefore, when standing on the second terrace at the time of the busy gathering, which took place regularly every fifth or market day—the eye was permitted to range over the quadrangle of the inner court, with its sparkling fountains issuing from the huge jaws of twisted serpents and gigantic cranes of gilded bronze; its painted sculpture and interminable porticoes, with their thoughtful promenaders, together with the lively and gaily dressed throng scattered in the open spaces and on the lower terrace that completed the quadrangle. And when, beyond this, through the gateway and over the enclosure might be descried the flower-decked piazza of the Tian-guez, its canals covered with freighted piraguas, and its picturesque and moving concourse; or when, pausing among the courtiers who lounged upon the platform at the foot of the marble ter-

race, you glanced up at the royal abode, with its long range of columned piers and tinted imagery, its projecting wings: the rich scroll-work of the cornice, the elaborate chiselling of the upper story—the pure white and lattice-like tracery of which gave an airy lightness to the stone; and beheld far back, like a great shaft shooting up from the midst of the structure, the square tower, divided by bands of mouldings, and turretted on the summit, which, with the exception of the central temple, was the highest point of the city: and caught the earliest and latest ray of the sun that seemed to shine, with peculiar brightness upon this last refuge of its worshippers.

On each side of the great courts, and flanking the terraces, were extensive gardens, which, being continued along the high embankment at the back of the palace, facing the lake, contributed with their groves and shrubbery to heighten the picturesque appearance of the whole edifice when viewed from the water. These shady retreats were laid out with infinite taste, and displayed the manifold resources of a highly agricultural people.

Here were vast beds of flowers of the most brilliant hue, and medicinal plants systematically arranged and tended by professed botanists, who cultivated that branch of science with a zeal

unknown to the Europeans of the day. While the extensive space thus appropriated was interspersed with umbrageous groves, walks, gilded summer-houses and fountains, the marble basins of which were supplied with fish, and surrounded by tessellated platforms.

The most interesting object in these private gardens was an elegant pavilion of wood, the frame-work of which was richly carved and painted, and inclosed by a complicated gilt lattice of the same material. This was an aviary, and contained a large collection of birds of the most beautiful and rarest kinds, that flew from tree to tree, and built their nests, and filled the neighbouring groves with dulcet warblings, as though they enjoyed the reality instead of the semblance of freedom.

As the plumage of these birds was of the richest and most costly description, many being brought from countries within the tropics, and procured at a great price, their feathers, as they moulted, were carefully collected, and used in the manufacture of the gorgeous feather painting already spoken of.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CENTRAL CHAMBER.

BUT the interior of the royal structure itself was the chief attraction: presenting as it did, with its endless maze of ornament, a world of labour and design. And the elaborate painting and sculpture with which each chamber, corridor, and open court was embellished had a symbolic meaning attached to it, well known to those learned in the hieroglyphical system of the Lahunzels; so that, apart from mere decoration, these emblazoned figures served the purpose of a universal chronicle. Thus the whole pile was a colossal book, as it were, with walls for pages. It was an illuminated encyclopædia of stone, illustrative of the traditions, theology, and acquirements of the Lahunzels.

One chamber was of a character distinct from

the rest, and occupied the lower part of the tower, which was of a very massive construction: as though intended to outlast the rest of the pile of which it formed the nucleus—such was the thickness of its walls.

Let us enter this chamber, so strongly environed: this secret heart of the palace—unseen, with Conrad.

It was a spacious hall, vaulted with that sort of arch peculiar to the ancient Americans, and formed by approaching the walls triangularly from a certain point, and uniting them overhead by a layer of horizontal stones. The sides were incrustated throughout with fine white cement, without any projecting ornaments on the lower part, which was divided from the upper by a plain cornice of stone at the base of the sloping arch; except a range of medallion frames, in alto-relievo, containing portraits, on prepared skin, of the successive kings of the valley.

But beyond this the vaulted ceiling was covered with symbolic figures, in stucco, arranged in compartments, and painted with the most lively colours so placed as to give that particular effect which the Egyptians also obtained by the skilful combination of a few simple hues.

The floor of the chamber was composed of variously coloured marbles, curiously inlaid: and

around it, at some distance from the sides, were ranged a number of gigantic statues, differently arrayed, with plumed crowns, feather-robcs, and jewelry of the most exquisite workmanship.

These were the hero-kings and demi-gods of antiquity, among whom, Conrad's conductor, Orazin, pointed out the mysterious Quetzalcoatli or Feathered Serpent, as his name implied, who was supposed to have dominion over the wind: as was expressed by the devices on the painted shield and jewelled sceptre which he bore.

Conrad gazed with lively interest upon this majestic figure with its golden crown shaped like an ancient helmet—and collar and ear-rings of turquoise; for it was the representation of that white-visaged, bearded man, who, in time of old, arrived from the north, and taught the nations of Anahuac the arts of civilization, and the folly of making any offerings upon their altars, save those of bread and flowers; and of whose lineage both Ellen and himself were supposed to be.

Behind these statues, in a row against the wall, were stands of wood elaborately carved, and containing each a glittering load of treasure; consisting of goblets, vases, and weapons of all kinds, together with diadems, sceptres, necklaces, and other ornaments, the whole presenting an inestimable mass of gems and precious metals; the collection of

ages by the princes of Lahunzel, and constituting the regalia of the sovereign.

In the midst of this conclave of sculptured giants: this museum of antique art, where, to the eyes of Conrad, all the riches of the earth appeared to be gathered together—was a raised dais of stone, upon which stood, in grim simplicity, the colossal Mastodon, the guardian of the descendants of the Umceks, the most honourable of the three tribes; not fashioned by human skill, but by the hand of the great architect himself, in channelled bone.

There it stood, perfect in every limb and rib, as when, clothed with muscle and replete with vital energy, it stalked through the lonely forests, long ere they yet owned the sovereignty of the newly-created man.

The bones of the men of a vast race, now extinct, were highly polished and deeply embrowned with age, and linked together by socket fittings of gold, so that they could be taken asunder and removed; and in this manner it had accompanied the fathers of the tribes in all their wanderings, from a period to which tradition scarcely reached, but which was believed to be coeval with the last living trace of the sacred quadruped.

It stood on its marble pedestal like a great

spectre, gaunt and web-like in the light of the torches which the two visitors carried to illuminate the caverned chamber. A relic of an ancient world: a product of creative vigour, when nature gave birth to forms, seemingly disproportioned to the sphere in which man was soon to claim a more extended rule;—whose crumbling remains are now the dust whereon we tread. Fossils of the glacier and rock, on whose winding-sheets are inscribed characters more eloquent than those of sarcophagus or mummy wrapping—of a former existence and an overwhelming power!

Conrad gazed up at the cyclopean form and at the great statues in their panoply of feather-work and gold; the dazzling boards on every side, and the florid decorations of the vault, in a sort of mechanical stupor that exhausted surprise. In that moment, if the very images with the externals, had suddenly become possessed of the faculty of life, and stepped forth to greet him at his entrance he would have conceived the act to be in unison with every thing in the secret chamber. It seemed to transport him away into the hidden cave of German romance, where the genii sat enthroned: and overawed him with the sentiment of a mighty past.

“There were giants in the time of that creature,” said he, pointing to the massive tusks and

ELLEN CLAYTON: OR,

ways of the skeleton, whose footstep would have crushed a man.

"The son of the feathered serpent is right," answered Orazin, in a low voice, "but the Monoskos still has power; look!"

And holding the torch he carried closer, so that the light fell directly upon the skull of the animal, Conrad saw upon its forehead, the impression of a red hand; this was repeated also upon the central stone of the arch, directly above.

"What is that?" he inquired.

"The mark of Unicum, my father," replied the Prince: "It is the custom of the kings of this valley, before they are crowned, to put themselves under the protection of the old inhabitant who stands before us, and they do so in that fashion, by putting paint upon their right hand and pressing it on his brow, and on the key stone above,—one for a pledge and one for a spell.—Thus do they become sacred, and privileged to rule over the tribes of the Kelis-kopan and Tonatiuh: the kindred people. The spirit of the Monoskos, my brother—is a spirit of power!"

We would willingly conduct the reader to many other places of interest, in this aboriginal city. To the quarters of the descendants of the Toltecs and Aztecs, in which the best artisans were to be found, and where specimens of the various

manufactures were preserved in a part of the council hall—To the gymnasium, from the parallel walls of which projected the great stone rings through which the players, in the national game of *tlachtli*, strove to drive the caoutchouc ball.

We would glide with him in a sculptured skiff, along the canals and under the fairy bridges, and past the chiselled façades of the palaces of the caciques: the terraced groves, the flat-roofed dwellings of the citizens upon which they lounged and often reposed—the great, pyramidal elevations, covered with symbolic sculpture and highly coloured, on which the temples stood with their gilded pinnacles and altars of fire. We would stroll with him through the thoroughfares, noting the different costumes, the distinguishing traits, the manners and customs of the associated tribes: and favour him with a dissertation perchance, on their social and civil polity. But we feel that we have lingered already, sufficiently long for his patience, among the *Lahnzels*.

Nor can we hope to imbue others with more than a feeble portion of the strong and craving interests we feel in everything that relates to the perished races whose ruined cities strew the forests of the western hemisphere: unnoted and uncared for by the degenerate Spaniard whose puny efforts

they seem to mock, with their vastness and labour of detail ; which, after centuries of oblivion, are only now appealing to the antiquary and awakening his sympathies for those of whose former existence, genius, and overthrow, they furnish the sole memorial.

Still he may plead guilty to a little of that enthusiasm with which we love to call together and re-arrange the scattered elements of a system different from our own ; the growth of a new continent, unique, independent, and sufficient not only for the natural wants, but for the luxuries and refinements of polished life.

The mournful sense of those desecrated abodes has hovered about our heart for years, haunting it like a dirge. The shades of the ancient inhabitants are stalking forth in these later days, with a demand of justice from the pale-faces, for what they were and what they suffered ;—shall they not have it, in the name of God !

This has impelled us to the effort, feeble as it is, of casting from our own shoulders a fraction of the ancestral debt, by striving to breath again life into the trodden clay, and to fill once more with their ancient denizens, the mansions of a forgotten people.*

* That the reader may convince himself the picture here given of the ancient American civilization is no fantastic creation of our

own, we refer him to the pages of Gomara, Bernal-Diaz, and a host of other chroniclers of the Spanish conquests in the west : as, likewise, to the more recent labours of Dupaix, Lord Kingsborough, Baron Humboldt ; and, above all, to Stephens' account of his wonderful discoveries in Central America and Yucatan ; and to Prescott's History of the Conquest of Mexico, a work that combines the usual qualities of an able narrative with a vigor, richness, and novelty of material, scarcely to be surpassed by the most stirring drama or the wildest fictions of a romance. To the researches of this accomplished writer we are indebted for no little aid in presenting a sketch of an Indian city, such as existed in the time of Cortes and his companions.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CLOSE OF THE CENTURY.

Time wore^{*} on swiftly with Conrad and his betrothed: or rather, they took no notice of flight, while occupied by the duties of their sacred mission, and with each other. Time is for the wretched,—and they are happy!

Thus the months slipped unconsciously away, and the frost of approaching winter, robbed though it was, of half its usual terrors in that sheltered region, withered the flowers, and stripped the trees in the beautiful gardens of the palace where the two lovers passed the most of their leisure hours: sometimes alone, but oftener, in the company of Sewantus and the different members of the royal family, who listened with wonder to what they were told of the unknown country from whence the fair-faced strangers had wandered:

and in return, would relate some wild legend, or sing a plaintive lay of their own primitive land.

Sewantus-walie was the only one who seemed to feel that this was not a period of repose; for he would wander hour after hour by himself through the groves, absorbed in meditation, and longing perchance, like a caged deer, for the freedom of the wilderness again. His nature, it must be confessed, was at utter variance with the life of those with whom he was. He felt sometimes, half stifled in the close atmosphere in which the breath of so many thousand mingled; while the constant bustle of the populous city disturbed the calmness of a soul that had received its early impressions in the wigwam of the hunter, and acquired a tone of the great solitudes in which he was bred.

It might be that the Indian pined for the sight of the kindred faces from which he had been separated so long; for in all the world, there is no more ardent lover of home and fatherland than the nomade hunter of the West. Or it might be that a sense of inferiority weighed upon him, amidst a people so cultivated, and possessing comforts and luxuries, of which he had known neither the existence nor the want, previous to his arrival in that wonderful little kingdom. But if such were the case, it only showed that his susceptibility was

greater than either his stoicism or his national pride: which he would have been loathe to allow.

In the meantime, Tazinco made another trip to the country of the Dakota, and by him Conrad sent intelligence of his safety and success to his old associates; bidding them to be of good cheer, and that he would return to them again, after the frost—in the moon when the geese lay—the month of April in the phraseology of the Sioux; when the snows being melted from the Upper plains, they would be enabled to commence their journey homeward.

This was an arrangement which, after mature deliberation it was concluded to adopt, as it would obviate the necessity of wintering *en route*; for even were they to set out, forthwith, on their return eastward, the comfort of their tender companion would compel the party to lay by during the rigorous season now close at hand; and Ellen might not find, between the mountains and the sea, such kindly shelter and attention as she then enjoyed.

It was so grateful to her to be at peace, after all she had suffered, that she felt no desire to abridge the period of her stay there, where she had a sacred duty to perform, and while her friend was by her side. Indeed, at times, she thought that she could be contented to remain

altogether in that quiet valley. It is so soothing to a dependent heart to know itself an object of general sympathy and regard; and such was Ellen in Lahunzel.

The exiled orphan found herself, all at once, the idol and cynosure of a people; but she shrunk from all public display, for she was not ambitious, and would gladly escape from the state and luxurious festivity in which she was obliged to take part, occasionally—both at the royal table and the entertainments given by the Caciques and nobles, in her honour, to the privacy of her domestic life. It suited her far better to sit in some shady bower of the terrace garden, true woman as she was, with her hand resting in another's; listening to the songs of birds and the whispering-plash of the fountains.

It was the time of the winter solstice, when nature puts on the livery of decrepitude, and the sun looks dim and shorn of its usual radiance, as it glimmers forth to preside over the shortest day.

The dreary end of December brought with it rain and gloom, and spread an awful apprehension over the land. The people of the valley regarded the melancholy concomitants of the season as portents of the approaching dissolution of all things; for immemorial tradition had declared that the time would arrive, when the sun should be

obliterated from the heavens and the darkness and confusion of chaos reign again over the universe ; a calamity supposed to have occurred already at four distinct periods, when the human race and every living thing had been swept away.—And that this final consummation was to take place, at the completion of the cycle, which, according to their chronology, consisted of fifty-two years : and which now, with the current year, was about to close.

The last week sped by : a week consisting of five intercalated days, added to make up the full complement of each solar revolution of three hundred and sixty-five. These were accounted particularly unfortunate, and belonging to no month or moon, were termed xona-kaba-kin or “ days without name ; ” and stood in cyphers on the calendar.

There was fasting and lamentation and prayer throughout this unpropitious week until the close of the last day ; the day of doom, in the belief of the people of Lahunzel, who gave themselves up to despair.

They crowded in thousands around the shrines of the city, with torn garments and dishevelled hair, supplicating the all-potent Deity, of whom they had lately heard, to spare them from the universal destruction about to happen in the world ;

and took a strange pleasure in forestalling it, by breaking the amulets, in whose virtue they no longer trusted, and their household goods and valuables, which were become a mockery; reminding them, too painfully, of a life that had reached its allotted term.

And when they beheld the fading luminary withdraw its last beam from the frowning heavens, and fall below the mountain peaks that reared themselves between, and with their icy phalanx seemed to bar them out at the same time from the hope of mercy and the light of day, they rushed in terror through the city, crying,—“Wo! wo! The wheel of time is complete! The serpent has accomplished its flight! wo! wo! The burner has extinguished the fire!”

And in each house, and upon every altar they quenched the flame, and veiled the faces of their women, in expectation of the universal death.

The three friends stood amid a mighty throng, on the upper terrace of that lofty temple which Unicum had erected to the Cause of causes—The unrevealed God. Not apart were they, in sympathy and painful solicitude, from those around; for the awful presentiment that sufficed to prostrate a whole people so completely could not fail to cast upon their souls a portion of its shadow.

What, if it were indeed no fable of an ancient

superstition—and there would be no more day? Gracious Heavens! The horror of the thought bent them, the two united ones, like the force of a giant hand, down upon their knees, to await in prayer the summons to the eternal judgment. But Sewantus remained erect, with his face aloft and his arms folded, stern and inflexible as a statue; though there was grief and nameless terror in his soul: and in every blast of wind, from the snow-covered hills, he heard the dreadful sentence of the Great Spirit, proclaiming death and devastation: or felt the rush of the accursed genii whom, they said, were about to descend and take possession of the world!

In the open air and the darkness they watched for midnight with their eyes fixed upon the Pleiades, the arrival of which at the zenith, would denote the conclusion of the cycle.

How sublimely shone those clustered stars! how they glistened in the vast firmament,—the serene obscure! There was a composure in their very twinkle that gave the gazers hope; an energy, glowing, subtle, and intense which did not speak of death. Could such glorious things be swept away for ever, crushed like mere sparks by the hand?

The constellation is beaming now directly down upon the holy tower. It has reached the extreme

point in the arch of night. It hangs suspended. There is not a breath in that vast crowd. Gods! It is motionless! No, for it has passed the meridian, and they are saved!

This was not the cycle of the fatal close. Honour to the stranger's God—the Everlasting—a new era had dawned!

Then burst forth a shout that reached from steep to steep of that mountain-land; a shout of joy, and gratitude: and deliverance, from mortal agony. From each temple-mound, terrace, house-top, and gathering-place of the crowded city; and from every hamlet and scattered fane throughout the vale rang forth that exulting peal: and the precipices and solemn glaciers echoed back the welcome cry that gave promise of stability to the natural scheme, and told that the sun was not blotted out, but would rise again at the proper time, to give light, fertility, and joy.

The priests, by the friction of wood, after the primitive manner of their first parents, kindled a faggot into flame: and each individual lighting his torch at the consecrated pile, carried the *new fire* into his home, and the hearths of the Lahunzels once more sent forth brightness and warmth, and tranquillity was restored.—But upon the altars of the temples the fickle element was beheld no more; for they had been told that it was for-

bidden to bow down before any graven image, or the likeness of anything in earth or heaven, and that the *material* was no fitting type of the soul of the universe,—the true and invisible God.

So they relinquished the worship of fire for the purer spiritual light, which with the opening of a new era diffused a radiance around that physical nature alone could not give. To them the world was truly regenerate; but the change was in their hearts.

CHAPTER XIV.

“ Oh ! that those lips had language ! Life hath passed
With me but roughly since I saw thee last.”—COWPER.

CONRAD and Ellen sat by the hearth in their private apartment in the palace, refreshing themselves with the cheering glow of the renewed fire, after the ritual we have described; and, as the former, buried in momentary thought, gazed vaguely at his companion's dress, his curiosity was suddenly attracted by an ornament suspended from the neck of the maiden : on which the fire-light played as on a surface of glass.

Now his emotions can be conceived, when, upon examining it this proved to be that identical miniature portrait of his mother, which, as the reader will remember was torn from his breast by Bison-ko-kok-has on the morning when already stripped and bound for the sacrifice he had been rescued by Salexis : as related in the first part of

this story. To the immediate interrogatives of how, when, and where she had become possessed of this precious relic, Ellen no less surprised than her lover, replied:

“Verily, Conrad, this amazes me. Little did I think when that unfortunate man who made me captive, threw the trinket unto me one day in his rough fashion, saying, ‘wear this; it is a charm of the pale-faces,’ that it would have such power to move thee. Neither did I imagine, when I felt my heart warm unto the gentle beauty of the face, and would gaze upon it until the tears came, as happened more than once; that it was the image of that beloved mother of whom thou hast spoken to me so often, my friend.

“But still I cherished it, unknowingly, as a remembrance of a Christian land; and for that it looked like such a holy thing among the barbarians. And though I laid it aside with my travelling apparel, and forgot to show it thee before: last night in our affliction I bethought me of it, and placed it here that it might act as a spell and relieve my anxious fears, as in my helpless solitude I used to think it did. Take it, dear Conrad, it is thine; and the blessing of one who loveth thee, even as she did, go with it also!”

But Conrad put back the extended hand and clasped the speaker to his heart.

“Keep it, beloved,” said he; “let it prove still thy comfort and safeguard hereafter, as it has been. I do truly believe it to have been miraculously preserved solely unto this end: and that the spirit of the mother has kept watch over the beloved of her child. I would not disturb the hallowed spell, therefore let the picture remain where it is, Ellen; there is no shrine more worthy the trust, for in thee have I often beheld her.

The floodgate of a stream almost dried up was opened afresh by this incident, and with the features of one, once so wildly mourned, the sweet household memories with which they were associated recovered their old sway, and obliterated for a time every other impression from Conrad’s heart.

In the rapture of his fancy he was a child again, and lay with his head in his mother’s lap while she sang to him some old song of the fatherland: her hand fondling his curls.

Again, he stood by the side of the Hudson, and gave her that last farewell, inarticulate with grief, when she departed upon the fatal voyage that had wrecked his early prospects and severed his domestic ties. Across the after portion of his career he looked back to that early time as a traveller, who catches afar off a glimpse of his

native home and indulges in the pleasant feeling of anticipated rest.

Alas! what to him was the fervour of such a dream where recollection lent no staff to hope, and only gave to distance an exaggeration that tantalized his orphaned heart? It was with a sigh that he turned himself away from the vision of those bygone days.

Nevertheless a direction was given to his thoughts: and he now felt within him a growing desire to return to his country, and looked eagerly forward to the period agreed upon for their departure from the valley.

“There is nature in it, my brother,” exclaimed Sewantus, to whom Conrad avowed this feeling. “I could not rest myself in a foreign land. It is good for a man to dwell where his fathers dwelt and to lay his bones beside theirs when his hunting is done. My heart is on the path of the sunrise.—Let us depart.”

CHAPTER XV.

THE JUBILEE—AND THE NEW LAW.

FOR thirteen days after the commencement of the new cycle, there was rejoicing in Lahunzel. It was the great jubilee, which, once in fifty-two years, celebrated the fresh respite of the world from its unalterable fiat of destruction and renewal, at certain periods of its age.

Clothed in the finest raiment and decked with garlands of flowers, they feasted and danced, and held public games, in honour of the new-born earth, and the glorious prospect lately held out to them through the fulfilment of the ancient prophecy concerning the children of Quetzalcoatl.

And now it was the last of the intercalated days;—of the thirteen that stretched, as it were a bridge between the two centuries, formed of the selected fragments of past time, without which

the calendar would have been incomplete and false. And on the threshold of the new epoch they resolved, by a solemn demonstration, to put themselves under the immediate auspices of the Great Father who was higher than the sun itself, and before all time.

On that morning, the grand avenues leading to the temple, were filled with a dense concourse, waiting the hour when, according to previous proclamation, the gates of the sanctuary would be opened to the admission of such as wished to take part in the grand ceremony of inauguration; and when the king, and the priesthood, and the caciques—the wisest and worthiest of the nation—were prepared to render homage to the supreme Lord, and to consecrate the tables of the new law which had announced itself, in words of light to the allied people.

This vast teocalli, occupying, as it did, the centre of a large space situated in the heart of the city—towards which point, the great thoroughfares conveyed, like rays to a common focus, was a prominent object from every quarter of the densely populated region, upon which its summit looked down.

Nor was it unworthy, in itself, the sublime thought that had led to its construction.

In the midst of a spacious area where the prin-

cipal streets terminated, a massive stone wall was seen, stretching on each side of a lofty archway, which rose in a point, and was bordered by a band of twisted serpents, sculptured in high relief, and covered with feathers, instead of scales; the huge jaws of the monsters extending towards the front, and containing between them the image of a human head. It was the plumed snake—the emblem of Time, that devoureth all things, and crushes the mechanism of mortal life in its maw.

This wall and arch was one of four that inclosed, and gave access to the sacred precincts of the temple: and in the quadrangle thus formed, were planted groves of cedar and pine, the natural stillness and sobriety of which threw a hallowed awe over the place; while their unfading verdure supplied a type of the Everlasting One whose shrine they girded in a deep and solemn phalanx, as if to preserve it from the unholy.

From each of the four gates a broad avenue led through the groves to the foot of a platform of cement that bordered a grand stone terrace, faced with carved symbols, and ascended by a broad flight of steps. From the top of this, leaving an ample platform, rose a second terrace of smaller dimensions, and above this a third, of still smaller compass, but greater in height than the rest; while the sides of all were covered with colossal

sculpture in relief, and washed with pure white lime. •

Thus the whole elevation, from its arrangement, and the gradual sloping in of the sides, presented the idea of a vast pyramid, when viewed from the edge of the grove; a peculiarity common to all the sacred structures of the city, the principal feature of which was the grand mound of terraces that formed the basement of the shrine. But in every instance, except the one before us, the stucco, or stone facing, was painted in vermilion, or a variety of brilliant colours; and consequently, they wanted that chasteness and simplicity which seemed to have been the aim of him who planned this holiest of temples.

Upon this mighty foundation, as on a pedestal, was placed a great white shaft, which towered up in admirable proportion, and was divided into nine stories, to represent the nine heavens. Above these was another, and on it, as a crown, rested the roof already spoken of; a kind of dome, coloured blue, and strewn with golden stars.

Such was the exterior of the sanctuary which Unicum, at the suggestion of Tugal Tanub, had erected to the unknown God, the Cause of causes; where the adorers of the sun had kindled no fire, and made no burnt offerings in honor of their deity, as at the other altars of the valley.

And now the booming of the great tun-keel, in the tower of the royal palace, announces the departure of the procession from the court of the Tianguetz; and issuing from the archway of the outer walk, came a band of cavalry clad in shining raiment of feather-work, precious stones and gold; their helms of blue turquoise decorated with silver bells, and surmounted by plumes of green feathers set in egrettes of red,—the badge of the highest military rank. These were the knights of Quachietin, the first order in the Tonatiuh division, led by Prince Orazin:—the flower of the valley chivalry. And as the sunbeams glanced from their bright lances, and played upon the embossment of their heraldic feather-fringed shields,—they carried the minds of the spectators back to the palmy days of their Aztec forefathers who went forth from the queenly city of the plains, to do battle for the glory of Anabuac.

After these came a band of priests, bare headed and robed in white garments bordered with embroidery of fine gold; these swung smoking censers as they went along, and diffused a sweet incense through the air of the crowded streets, which was wafted, in grateful odours to the neighbouring azoteas, from whence the inmates of the houses gazed down upon the gallant show.

Then appeared in succession, the retainers of

the royal household, in their livery and badges of office; among whom was a company of knights armed with battle-axes of copper, and constituting the body guard of the king.—The great caciques and councillors, in gorgeous robes of scarlet and gold embroidery, and tippets of feather-work or fur.—The heralds and standard-bearers, with the ensigns of the different houses, orders, and tribes.—A band of musicians with flutes, cornets, and atabals or kettle drums, *à la Morisca*, which made a wild but solemn melody as they marched slowly on, swelling out the chorus of a sacred song chaunted by a troop of vestals that walked behind: clothed in loose white gowns, trimmed with silver thread-work on the skirt and neck, and wearing garlands of artificial flowers, fabricated of coloured feathers, which rivalled the brilliancy of nature itself. In the midst of these was Ellen dressed in a simple garb of white, like the rest, except that it was entirely without ornament of any sort; and beside her was the Princess Consocil, her friend.

The sweet voices of these attendants of the temples,—who were chosen from the highest and most beautiful in the land; thrilled the soul of the listener, as they rose aloft in plaintive psalmody, amid the deep intervals of the drums; and, together with the appearance of the fair choristers themselves, brought associations of spring-like

freshness in that winter time ;—of birds and blossoms and balmy airs, in the heart of the snow-covered sierras.

Then came Tazincó, bearing the sacred standard of Lahunzel, emblazoned with the device of the triple alliance, in plumaje and gold ; and after him king Unicun, in a costly tippet, formed of bosses of precious stones set in gold, and worn over a mantle of the rarest white fur, and a long robe of purple hair-cloth, resplendent with embroidery and gems. He wore also a jewelled crown—like a pontifical tiara, raised in a semicircle in the front, and adorned with an egrette of waving plumes behind.

Conrad and Sewantus walked on either side of the king, in dresses of ceremony : and after them came a large body of guards, each company in the uniform and bearing the cognizance of its respective leader ; followed by the different professions and trades of the three quarters, with banners and emblems displayed. The whole pageant terminated with a second corps of flute-players and drummers, and a strong troop of merchant knights, mounted and equipped in their peculiar fashion ; but wearing over the usual costume an embroidered titnatli or short cloak, used on festive occasions. In their hands they bore the terrible maquahuitl or sword-club, their favourite weapon : with its transverse blades of

obsidian or copper, which could shiver the stoutest mail, and overturn a bison at a blow.

As this stately procession swept slowly along through the canalled streets: from time to time, the different corps sang legendary songs of a devotional cast, until they filed under the sculptured portal of the temple, when every voice and instrument grew still.

What a bush there was in those pines into which they came from the gay and bustling city, hoary as they were, with fine frost-work crusted upon each limb—the congealed breath of winter! How pure and noble appeared the spotless fane, through their funereal plumes!

They seemed to have crossed over the threshold of time and to have entered within the confines of that Eternity where all was peace: and where the breath of passion or the touch of decay disfigured not a beauty and a serenity alike perpetual.

They wound up the stairs and along the marble terraces, with banners, plumes and flowing mantles gleaming in the sun; but with the pomp and splendour of an Eastern pageant they combined the thoughtful gravity of demeanour peculiar to the West: and were impressed, moreover, with the solemn nature of the purpose that had brought them to the shrine of the new God.

A vast chamber, occupying the lower story of the temple, through the centre of which was a row of square columns covered with symbolic sculpture, gave admission to the principal portion of those who took part in the ceremony; while a promiscuous crowd covered the platforms of the terraces, and the open space below, to the limits of the sacred grove, and even the broad avenues, to the gateways beyond.

The walls of the sanctuary were incrustcd with alabaster, wrought in the semblance of every herb and shrub, and tree that gave nourishment, or supplied the various wants of man: these were divided into compartments with borders of fruit and flowers, composed of inlaid marbles, gold, silver, and precious stones. And festooned, from pillar to pillar, flowers of feathers hung, in long wreaths, over the heads of the assembled throng.

At the upper end of this chamber was a recess and platform, with an altar table containing a number of volumes and scrolls; the records of the revealed Word which they had obtained, verbally, from the stranger. Around this were clustered the priests and vestals; and before it stood Ellen, Conrad, and a venerable, white-haired minister; the successor of the ill-starred Tugal Tamub.

At a signal, the high-priest waved his hand, and the assistants swung their golden censers, and

a cloud of perfume filled the interior, while the whole multitude knelt down.

Then Ellen offered up a simple prayer for the sake of those who, through her humble means, had been made acquainted with the Christian faith, and were desirous of being received into the bosom of the True Church; imploring the Divine Spirit to nourish the little seed then planted, that it might bring forth good fruit when she was departed from this her pleasant place of sojourn, to which she bequeathed her blessing with tremulous accents and a tearful eye.

Then the Teotenetli, or high-priest, consecrated the tables of stone, upon which the new commandments were inscribed, and which had been set up in the wall of the adoratorio previous to the ceremony; after which, each folded book or scroll in succession received the sign-manual of Ellen, who, in compliance with the wish of her neophytes, left upon them the impression of her right hand in vermilion, which was a symbol of consecration and power with the Lahunzels, as with many other nations of the far West: and was intended moreover to testify to the authenticity of the scripture writings that were thereafter to be their guide.

Nor was this all; for she had to repeat the same process upon the four sides of each story of

the sacred edifice, where the print of the small red hand was shown to after generations as a memorial of the bright-faced virgin who had fulfilled the promise of Quetzalcoatli the Good.

Then the congregation issued out upon the terrace, where the high-priest repeated the new law, and made a long oration to the assembled concourse, after which the great gong proclaimed the close of the rites ; and to the roll of the wave-like sound that issued from the starry tower, they defiled again through the grove, and out of the gateway of the temple, in the same order in which they came ; but each bore away from the precincts a sprig of evergreen, to serve as a memento of the day when, for the first time, they avowed openly, and by an act of universal worship, the supremacy of the Invisible Spirit, who was greater than the Fire !

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RAT GNAWS HIS WAY OUT OF THE CAGE, AND THE GUESTS
DEPART.

THE voices of spring were once more heard in the glades and sunny slopes of the valley, and long ere the higher ranges had doffed their snow mantle, the alluvion of the mountain-girded retreat was covered with young verdure of the richest green. Indeed, it might be said that winter almost overlooked this favoured spot while exhausting its fury among the Alpine solitudes above; for in the middle of its fierce rule, fires were scarcely required, and the hardier flowers ventured to unfold themselves in the more sheltered nooks. The cattle also sought the fresh grass among the stubble fields, while a terrific tempest of wind and snow was each day roaring among the peaks of the great chain, filling up the ravines with drifts,

and veiling the glaciers altogether from the sight of the inhabitants of the plains.

Nature took, as it were, a brief nap only, and recommenced her process of regeneration, and the birds flocked back joyfully to the groves, whence they had made a flying excursion to the southward, merely as a sort of relaxation from their social duties: and now sat industriously to work to thatch their habitation anew, in anticipation of the embryo brood.

And what was Bizon-ko-kok-has about all this time, in his prison within the roof of the palace? Was the dark spirit at work still in its fleshy tenement? or had the new dawn penetrated into the deep recesses of his scheming brain, and exorcised its fierce antipathies and obstinate tenacity of purpose? We shall see.

At first, possessed by a violent paroxysm of his old malady, he paced, day after day, his confined cell, a terror and a mystery to his keeper, who brought him food and kept watch over him during his temporary madness. This individual listened to the broken imprecations and incessant tramping of the prisoner, from the outside of the barred door, until he actually believed that he also was growing mad with the strange fancies communicated to his mind by the intractable ferocity and restlessness of his charge.

At last, however, the attack exhausted itself; and as the sorcerer regained his senses and self-possession again, the subtlety of his character also revived, and caused him to feign a composure and docility unusual to him in his sanest mood, with the hope of inducing his guardian to relax his vigilance; for though he could not see him, he knew well, cunning one as he was, even in his wildest paroxysms, that there was somebody watching him from the other side of the door.

“The weird creature has worried himself well again at last, that is quite plain. Now will Tecum-zu refresh himself; for, by the god that weeps for the sorrowful, watching has worn him to the bone!”

Such were the mental conclusions of the jailer, who contented himself thenceforth in visiting the prison at meal-times only, which was twice during the day.

“He, he!” chuckled the conjuror, surveying his small apartment leisurely, and with twinkling eyes, as soon as he was assured of being alone: and at the same time drawing forth from the leg of his skin mocassin a knife haft, to which remained a couple of inches of the broken steel. “He, he! this wigwam was not made for the Medicine Owl of the sunrise. His cunning is stronger than stone, ay, many times!”

The isolated chamber in which he had been confined was hollowed in the roof, and lighted by several rude openings made in the wall between the deep sculpture of the cornice, but invisible from the grand façade of the palace. These Bizon-ko-kok-has eyed with peculiar interest, and selecting the one most suitable to his purpose, he commenced to pick out, with his implement, the cement that fastened the stonework together, which in that particular place was found to consist of several smaller pieces; in the hope that, by destroying their connection, he might render the aperture sufficiently large to give passage to his attenuated body, and so effect his escape.

The better to evade discovery, he worked chiefly at night, hiding the *debris* under the mat that served him for a bed; and with the untiring industry of an ant, dug, month after month, with his iron tool, into the hard cement and the harder stone, until his labours were crowned with success, and that portion of the massive cornice was ready for removal whenever he might think fit to avail himself of his privilege, and slip away from his rat-like abode.

From one of the higher officers of the household, who, by the command of the king, visited him from time to time, to see that he was well provided for, the prisoner was enabled to gather

such information as he could make available to his plan; for this person, thrown entirely off his guard by the rational behaviour of his questioner, was induced to acquaint him with the projected departure of his intended victim, together with the period fixed upon for the return of the foreign guests to their own land.

Once satisfied upon this point, Bizon-ko-kok-has asked no more questions, but concocted his design.

The time insensibly drew nigh when the fair-faced strangers were to bid farewell to those with whom they had passed so many peaceful days; but, engaged in preparations for the long journey before them, they scarcely noticed the rapid progress of the season, until it brought them to the eve of the last day. Then they would willingly have lengthened out the remaining hours of their stay into weeks, had that impatient traveller, Time, chosen to flag for their true hearts.

Another sun would behold them once more on the wide desert track, which, with a new sense of exile, like that of our first parents, would conduct them each moment farther from the boundary of this Eden of the West. They could not dwell upon the thought of parting from those with whom they were so closely allied by the relationship of kindness, without a pang of

regret. Yet they shrunk not, and, supported by each other, could look steadily and with confidence in the face of the future; as with the original outcasts upon solitude, there was a consolation in the thought that

“The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide.”

That night, over their sleeping heads, the sorcerer, with a triumphant grin, pulled away the stones of the cornice, gathered up his mat, and dragging it after him, passed through the enlarged opening; when, with the help of the projecting sculpture without, he soon stood upon the azotea, or platform before the second story, which ran entirely round the edifice.

Here, taking advantage of a loose rope belonging to the great awning, now once more used to shade the principal entrance during the day, he let himself down into the private gardens, groped his way to an adjoining landing, took possession of a canoe, and paddled swiftly and unseen past the city and towards the outlet of the lake. There he landed, and struck along by the discharge, keeping closely within the screen of copse-wood that fringed the stream to the foot of the mountain barrier.

It was midnight when he stood beside the gulf

where the waters found an issue through the solid rock. He looked down into the foaming and inky flood, that disappeared with a muffled roar under the arch of the cavern, and shuddered. Could he consign himself to that huge chasm which, as a throat, swallowed up the superfluous moisture of the valley?—and was there indeed no other way of traversing the barrier?

On his right he saw the white dress of the guard at the bronze portal, glimmering in the starlight—there was no hope in that direction.

Above him towered an impregnable rampart of rock, one thousand feet in air; it was too steep for a lizard to scale: what chance did it offer to him? He ground his teeth with desperation, and his head reeled.

There was but one resort left, and that staggered his resolution. He sat down awhile, and buried his face in his crossed arms. He started up again as if stung, gesticulated wildly, shook his clenched fist at the invisible city with a silent curse; wound the matting well around him, and plunged into the boiling torrent that rushed through the subterranean passage.

Ye powers of might, what an awful plunge it was! Like a flash he shot the tunnel, and was on the outside of the mountain, gasping in the tide. But in the interval, brief as it was, ages

rolled over the soul of the sorcerer—ages of horror!

How the forked fire danced in his eyes: how the sharp rocks cut and grated away his tough covering: or how the water fiends hissed in his ears—who can tell? We only know that he escaped, miracle as it was; and when the wave flung him upon a gravel bank that intercepted its course, far below the exit from the cavern, he crawled like a half-drowned cat into the thicket hard by, and lay there for many hours in a most rueful condition, torn, bleeding, and exhausted: and feeling as if each bone in his lean anatomy were disjoined by the fearful exploit; which, had he been, in very fact, the tenacious carnivore to which we have compared him, might have curtailed to a cypher that plurality of lives for which it is proverbial.

The morning was fair which ushered in the hour of departure, and a numerous cavalcade accompanied Ellen and her protectors to the boundary wall.

Everything that could contribute to the comfort of the travellers had been supplied them in abundance by their generous hosts. Each rode a magnificent horse, chosen from the finest in the king's stables; in addition to which were two others, laden with tent furniture and baggage.

Besides these, the saddles of the three strangers could bear testimony to a more substantial token of royal munificence, in the shape of jewels to a vast amount, with which they were loaded, at the command of the king, in despite of all remonstrance on the part of those who had already received so many favours at his hands.

Consocil wept long, in the arms of Ellen, who mingled her tears with those of her friend. They had been like attached sisters to one another, and it was terrible to part when they knew it would be for ever.

The Princess kissed her on the brow, the cheeks, the hair, in a transport of tenderness and grief; calling her—"her own little dove,—her bosom pearl, whom she would never, never see again."

Alas! partings are sad things; we cannot dwell upon them. But when the waters were shut off from the vaulted channel, and the great gates opened wide, to give them passage, Unicum took Ellen and Conrad, each by the hand, and spoke to them in these words:—

"Go, children of Quetzalcoatl the beneficent; and with ye go the blessing of an old man, and of his people, whom ye have made rich, not with earthly goods, but with a wisdom which cannot pass away.

“Go to your own land and be happy,” he added, unfastening a signet jewel from his wrist and handing it to Conrad, as he continued:—

“But should evil days darken over thee, then come back and show this token to the first belonging to the valley, whom ye shall meet, and he will straightway bring ye to Lahunzel; and the warrior will also find a home waiting for him here, and ye will reign with Unicum in his kingdom. Enough! The God who conducted you here, to deliver unto us his good word, will guide you back safely again to the eastern sea. My children, farewell!”

Neither could reply a word to the benediction of the good king, for in another moment the bronze doors shut behind them, and they were clattering along the dripping cavern, by the light of torches born by a party of merchant knights, conducted by Orazin and Tazineo, who were to escort them through the secret pass that led to the Dakota plains.

When Conrad found himself once more upon the slope of the rugged Sierra, with the sun-light around, and the wall of rock on either side, he could easily have believed that he had never left the spot since he paused there, in his progress with Sewantus and the mysterious Pearl-trader, so many months before; and that he had merely

read in some old book a pleasant fable; telling of the existence of a stately Indian city in the heart of that wild mountain, in the full enjoyment of its native resources, and presenting a type, entirely new, of art and social progress; magnificent vigorous, and complete,—but shut out and concealed by an impervious bar from the knowledge of the whole world.

Yet, incredible and romantic as the idea appeared, both memory and the talisman which he yet held in his hand, assured him of its truth; while conviction was made more positive still, by the reality of the gallant band of turbaned cavalry that filed before him, with their burnished shields and javelins, to take up the line of march through the ravine; and, above all, by the presence of the loved one at his side.

Alas! that he should have been the sole European to whom, unaided by his sword, was vouchsafed a glimpse of that “antique and extinct world which we call the new!”

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ORPHANS CONTRACT A FRIENDSHIP WITH EACH OTHER.

UNDER the guidance of their friends, the passage of the Rocky Mountains was made without mishap to the travellers, or any incident worthy of notice, except that, in the well-known dell, midway across the hills, where Ellen pitched her tent, and the children slept in the cave at the end of the valley, one of the horses belonging to the escort was missing next morning, and though the neighbourhood was searched, no signs of the animal could be found: so that, supposing it had strayed away and got lost among the ravines, they left it to its fate, and substituted one of the pack-horses in its stead.

And now, debouching from the dark recesses of the mountain chain, they beheld beneath them the

sunny expanse of the plains, rolling away, like an emerald sea, to the eastern horizon. The majestic landscape appeared in the guise of an old and familiar friend to the adventurers. It seemed to welcome them back with a smile to its bosom.

Ellen's heart swelled with rapture at the charming prospect, and Conrad saw the child-spirit of former days dancing in her eyes, and felt very happy to think that the vicissitude she had undergone had not subdued her natural enthusiasm, or deprived her of that freshness of feeling which claims relationship with whatever is simple and good.

"Behold, brothers!" said Tazineo, pointing to a spot on the plain below, where, in the shadow of a great spur that projected from the main range far into its expanse, a white tent was visible: "Yonder is the place of rendezvous, and your companions are already upon the ground. It is enough. The people of Unicorn may not go further. The road is made clear."

Accordingly, the escort took its leave of them at that place, and it was with no ordinary emotions that the three foreigners gazed after the retreating files of horsemen, until they were concealed by the cliffs; for they knew it was the last they should ever see of the kindly Lahunzels.

The parting words of Tazineo and Orazin

lingered yet in their cars; they were; characteristic of the speakers; how could they forget them?

“Brothers, remember the oath; thou hast never crossed over these mountains,” was the injunction of the former; while the Prince, as he shook them by the hand, for the last time, asked them “to pray for Consocil and Orazin, that they might meet again the children of Quetzalcoatl in the sunny land where the warrior puts off his armour and there is no parting hour.”

But there was little space left them to indulge in reflection, for scarcely had the hoofs of the horses exchanged the stony channel of the mountain pass for the soft turf of the undulating ground beyond, than a shrill whoop resounded among the hollows, and scouring along at full speed came two horsemen, half hidden in a cloud of dust, and bearing towards them, from the opening in front. “Ugh-yah!” ejaculated Sewantus, shading his eyes from the sun and bending eagerly forward: “The voice of the sunrise is an eagle’s scream; it warms me like a fire. I hear the thunder of warriors when they shout the battle cry yet; those who make it are friends. Look you, the voice of the sunrise is strong!”

He was right in his conjecture, for, in another minute, the strangers, checking their horses with

a suddenness that threw them backward upon their haunches, made signs of greeting, and disclosed the embrowned and vigorous features of Couteau Croche and Salexis.

Joyful was the meeting between the friends, and violent the ebullition of feeling on the part of the honest *voyageur*, who was only restrained by the presence of Ellen from enacting a wild dance, upon the spot, in commemoration of the event.

"What cheer, my braves!" he shouted, as soon as the dust was out of his eyes, and he could distinguish their faces clearly; "a thousand thunders! but the sight of thee is wild crows to a fasting red-skin. Pardon, madam," added he, more gently, to Ellen, lifting his fur cap with involuntary respect, and gazing in open wonder at her beauty, for he had never seen her before. "How fares it with you? The passage over these hills is a rough task for a delicate frame like yours: I reckon you must be sorely fatigued."

"Not so, my friend," replied she, presenting her hand; "I am an old traveller, thou seest, and have made rougher journies; but I thank thee for thy forethought nevertheless, and have come to put myself under thy guidance, and that of my old acquaintance Salexis, whom I see here. Canst thou conduct me home?"

“Can Couteau Croche! Ay, lady, as straight as the bee flies, when he is charged with plunder. The path is long, but the longest must come to an end.”

“Salexis is a plain warrior,” observed the Abenake, quietly; “what he can do, he will; he is in the Great Spirit’s hands.”

“Take no heed about the path, daughter of the pale faces,” said Sewantus, with decision. “There is not an arrow’s flight of it that I have not taken account of, many times; my spirit has been backward and forward upon it of late. Be not afraid.”

“True, Sewantus,” said Conrad; “with such a famous band it will go hard indeed if we cannot make our way to the Lakes, and should there chance to be foemen in the track, why, we can confront them like veterans, and prove, my comrades, that we have lost neither sinew or soldier-ship by our sojourn in the west.”

Cordially responding to this self-confident tone, they jogged on cheerfully towards the spot where the hunters had erected their skin lodge, and where a suitable encampment was soon formed, and Ellen sought a temporary rest from her fatigues.

And now, to console themselves somewhat for the extraordinary reserve of their associates, who, in answer to their numerous inquiries, told them

that their lips were pledged to silence respecting their adventures, the two hunters expatiated largely upon the incidents of the chase in which they had been engaged, and pointed, with no slight pride, to the ornamental collars of grizzly bears' claws, which each wore; and to two bales of choice furs, in proof of the veracity of their accounts. Conrad learned also, that in consequence of the scarcity of game in that neighbourhood, the village of the Medicine Bows was broken up and about to remove on the following day, to a region further south, to which the bison herds had migrated for the benefit of the warmer pasturage it afforded during the winter season.

In consequence of this, they were in the saddle before sunrise next morning, and, ere long, fell in with the van-guard of the tribe, led by that lively little chief with the gloomy name, the Two Skulls, who was quite pleased to see his former acquaintances again, but far too scrupulous of his dignity to risk it by asking questions; though his inquisitiveness must have been sadly puzzled by the sight of the fair maid who bore them company.

With a brief colloquy, therefore, he passed on, and then, in a long procession extending for miles over the undulating prairie, came the different members and appurtenances of the Indian village,

each lodge separate, with equipage and furniture of every description; that connected with the tent itself, stowed between the poles, one end of which was attached, shaft-like, to each shoulder of a horse, while the other trailed upon the ground.

It was a novel and animating spectacle, and one that interested, in no ordinary degree, the late guests of the more sedentary Lahunzels, by the vivid picture it presented of the warlike and nomadic people of the plains. They felt themselves to be once more within that vast theatre of physical energy and strife, where the mere wants of life engrossed the natural faculties, and where war was less a casualty than an element of its crude condition, to which action was every thing, and repose death.

The plain seemed alive with men, women, and children, accompanied by long trains of laden horses in endless succession, and yet in admirable order. Here a squadron of gallant warriors mounted, painted, and equipped in the prevailing style, swept proudly along, singing songs of battle to the wild strains of flutes and the measured beat of the drum; while occasionally a party would dash off from the ranks, and charge along the skirts of the line, with whoopings and levelled spears, until they were lost to view.

“By the bones of the Maquas!” exclaimed Sewantus, his eyes glistening at the stirring sight, “I feel as if I stood upon my father’s land. The life of my veins is braced up like a bow-string in dry weather. The spirit of the sunrise is a spirit of power.”

In another place a bevy of maidens curved jauntily along, gaily attired in quill-worked capes, mantles, and feather head-dresses, the trappings of their horses, bedizened with embroidery, and having appended to them thin plates of copper, that jingled like cymbals as they rode; and as they approached the place where the travellers were, their peals of merry laughter grew still.

In the midst of these, the rallying point and star of the group, was Heladee the minstrel, who, at a sign from Salexis, turned aside out the line, to greet him, while her companions proceeded on.

Now she came forth like a wild, queenly creature, and with a bound of her spirited little mustang that shook her coloured plumes, she was by the side of the hunter, panting with exercise; her graceful elastic figure erect and full of confidence and glowing life, and her face beaming with vivacity. But no sooner did she recognize the other members of the party than her easy assurance left her at once, for she blushed, cast down her eyes, and remained mute and withdrawn; like a

sensitive flower which a touch has suddenly collapsed.

"What a changeable sort of bird you are, little one!" said Salexis to the Indian girl, in an endearing tone, for she was an especial favourite of his; "Why should the sight of an old acquaintance make thee sad? Here is a girl like thee, whose face is white. She wants to speak words to the flower of the Medicine Bows."

Heladec looked curiously from under her long lashes, and beheld Ellen. Gradually, as if fascinated by the face which was bent smilingly upon her, her gaze became more open and her manner more assured; and guiding her horse to where Ellen was, she said in a low plaintive voice, "Heladec will speak with the stranger. What would she? We are on the prairie, and we will be friends."

* "That will we, else do I mistake me very much," was the reply; "for the rest, let us draw apart, and I will tell thee what I wish."

"Good," rejoined Heladec; whereupon the two rode on in advance of the others, when the following conversation took place:—

"I have heard," commenced Ellen, with an embarrassment which wore off as she proceeded; "of thy strange story, and how that thou art without kin, stranger among the Dakotas. She

who speaks is also a stranger, upon a long journey, with no one of her own sex to call friend; and thou knowest that it is a grievous thing for a maiden to be so placed; and not be seemly. Now they say pleasant things of thee, and since I have seen thee I have taken a great fancy to thy company; so have pity upon me, dear Heladee, and let us travel together and be friends."

At this straightforward and earnest appeal, the Indian stared at the fair speaker, and her dark eyes dilated with excessive wonder.

"Heladee is in a dream," she murmured; "she hears perplexing words. What would the daughter of the stranger?"

"That Heladee go with her to her country and be unto her as a sister; because that, like Heladee, the stranger is an orphan in the world."

The one addressed mused for a time, and seemed strongly agitated. At length she said:

"The poor fawn was left desolate when the herd was scattered, and stricken down; but Wakonda is just—Heladee is not desolate now. Wherever she looks she beholds friendly faces; wherever she goes there she meets a welcome and a kind word. "She could find it in her heart to love the stranger and be her sister; but if she left her country and went into another, perhaps she would soon die. If her face turned white, like

the stranger's, in a foreign land, then none would ever know her again, for the Pure-fountain of the Medicine Bows."

"Fear not Heladee," replied Ellen, with anxious solicitation; for she had set her heart upon carrying off the beautiful Indian as her *companion du voyage*; "there is nothing whence I go that can do thee harm. If thou refuse me this favour, I will be much distressed. I am alone, a maiden like thee: think of this. He who spoke well of thee said that thou wert of a noble spirit, and to his fancy, not placed as thou wouldst wish to be among the Medicine-Bows, "Therefore was it I spoke to thee, concerning this."

"Who discoursed of my affairs to the stranger's ears?" demanded Heladee, with an air of offended dignity, drawing herself up as she spoke.

"One of a nature strangely akin to thine, if I read him aright, and well inclined to do thee a kindness; a warrior, among those we left behind, but now, called Sewantus-walie."

Again the tell-tale blood stole over the cheek and brow of the prairie girl, and she dropped her eyes before the speaker's earnest gaze. How the heart of poor Heladee fluttered! how every nerve of her frame thrilled at the mention of that potent name! with what a soft sensation of rapture she received the intelligence that he had thought had

spoken approvingly of her! Before she asked the question, she felt convinced that it was quite out of the possibility of things for her to leave her home and adopted people, to accompany the fair stranger: now, however, her views were entirely altered, and it appeared not so difficult a thing to do, after all.—In certain cases, there is no talisman half so influential as a name!

A sudden light broke upon Ellen's mind, as she observed the effect of her words upon the high-spirited girl, and, woman-like, she followed up the advantage without delay, by saying:

“Well, Heladee, thou art angered, I perceive; so we had best let the matter drop. I did believe thou wouldst have been content to go: I was foolish minded, that is all.”

The Indian glanced quickly up at Ellen, hesitated, and seemed completely at a loss: at last, with half averted face, she said naïvely,

“Heladee is not evil tempered: what is good, that is she anxious to do. But it is not wise to say, I will, or I wont, without reflection! this business bewilders me so I cannot think upon it. When does the stranger set out upon the path? Heladee must have time before she can decide.

“That shalt thou surely have, good Heladee,” answered Ellen with a smile, for she saw that she had won, and straightway recorded a promise in

her heart, to love and befriend the artless maid whose grand secret she fancied she had discovered.

"Thou shalt have all day to think and consult with thy friends, and to-morrow we will choose two roads or one, as thou seest fit; is it not good?"

"It is good," was the rejoinder; upon which Heladee put her horse in rapid motion, and galloped on in search of her companions.

Ellen followed the retreating figure of the Indian belle in admiration of its symmetry and wild grace, until, with plume and waving mantle, it hovered for a moment like a bright bird, and disappeared behind a roll of the undulating plain. "Strange," thought she, as she rejoined her party, "that all this time a wise Providence should have been weaving a secret bond between this noble child of the desert and Conrad's friend!"

They now came up with the main body of the tribe, and among a crowd of armed horsemen, composed chiefly of the middle-aged and elders of the people, arose conspicuously the plumed crest of Black-Eagle, the gigantic leader of the Medicine-Bows, whose charger of the rare foreign breed, was striped like a zebra with vermilion and white clay.

Making their way up to the chieftain, the

travellers renewed acquaintanceship, and claimed his hospitality for the time. Black-Eagle received them all very graciously, and, in virtue of his authority, asked numerous questions of Conrad concerning his expedition and the "pale-faced woman" who was with him: all of which the latter endeavoured to satisfy, to the best of his capacity, without infraction of his pledge, or having recourse to equivocation; well knowing that Indian etiquette would prevent his questioner from pushing his inquisitiveness beyond a certain point in a matter that did not directly concern him.

Had the Horns-of-the-Moon seen the face of Ellen, he might have found more difficulty in satisfying him; for during her short stay in the village with the sorcerer, in her mystic capacity, she had been seen by a few, among whom was the centenarian. Upon him she made a powerful impression as he believed implicitly in her supernatural endowments; he would therefore, no doubt, have been highly scandalized at the idea of the white Medicine-woman riding with her face uncovered among the young braves.

But this did not happen, for the old man was fast asleep within his covered cradle, which, slung between two horses, bore him gently along, and with its motions lulled him to repose.

As may be supposed, the proposition made to Heladee caused a great sensation among the Medicine-Bows, and no sooner was it rumoured about that she intended leaving them than the poor girl was assailed by protestations, entreaties and tears on all sides, against the measure. These she allowed to have full vent, and indeed sympathised with herself too entirely, to restrain; for however she might grieve and shrink with strong reluctance from the cruel alternative: however she might struggle against her bosom feeling, she was conscious that her future course had already been decided, and that she would go.

The storm subsided, like most violent commotions, in a total calm, and ere her friends were fully conscious of what they were doing, they had yielded their consent and made up their minds to lose their favourite.

Accordingly, Heladee signified her assent to Ellen, took leave of her adopted relatives, with the exception of Tatunga, who was absent upon a distant excursion: and departed next day with the travellers, carrying with her the good wishes and regret of the whole tribe. •

They journeyed on therefore, without delay, shaping their course south east over the boundless plains, which seemed almost entirely devoid of game or living creature, save a few sage rabbits

and now and then a colony of marimots or prairie dogs, that honey-combed the ground, for miles, with their burrows, and rendered the footing unsafe for the horses.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TATUNGA TELLS HOW HE WON THE GAME.

AT length, late in the forenoon of the third day, Sewantus, who rode in advance, gave the signals—caution and—a man; and drawing within a clump of trees that fringed a lofty eminence, by which they were, they soon descried a single horseman, coming at speed.

His course was like an arrow, straight to the west; he crossed before them; he saw them not under the shadow of the trees: they might have transfixed him in the twinkling of an eye, as he passed in hot haste, bound after bound.

“Hoo—Hoo—Yah!” shouted Sewantus, with a ringing whoop that sent the stranger back, as if a bolt had struck him in the front and arrested his hurricane-like career; yet true to his instinct, even then, he half drew an arrow from his sheath, ere he

detected his mistake and distinguished the character of his assailants; but upon the sign—Dah-cota, which they made, he came immediately forward, and gave to view the severe lineaments of Tatunga, the scalpless; his clothes or what remained of them, a mere shred of deer skin, covered with dust and blood; his features, usually prominent and stern, rendered more so by want and extreme toil, his eyes blood-shot and wild, and yet glaring with a proud expression that accorded not with the woeful plight in which he seemed to be.

A halt was now made to refresh themselves and horses, and after first satisfying the cravings of his hunger which exceeded all belief, having, as he avowed, not tasted anything except dressed skin for many days past, Tatunga smoked a pipe in silence, and then, drawing them aside from the females, took from under his horse-robe a human head, scalpless and gory, and threw it down in their midst, saying dryly:—

“Tatunga has won the game.”

“What is it?”

“*Tonnerre de Dieu!*”

“Of what speaks the Medicine Bow?” they each exclaimed, aghast with surprise, and unable at once to account for the presence of the hideous trophy thus abruptly displayed.

"Of the game with the Scarred Arm," replied Tatunga, with a tone of irony; "head against scalp and head against head, of which my brothers may bethink them, if they have memories. I told them the story when we first lit our pipes together, under the bluff in the battle valley.

"Could the dead talk, then the thing which lies before you might finish the tale.

"But, look you, though that mouth cannot say a word now, on the faith of a warrior, it once spoke the language of an honourable man, a true brave. I called the Scarred Arms dogs: I was a fool! Tatunga has triumphed over their bravest, and he is vexed inwardly; let him look for dropped stars, for he is a fool!

"Brothers, there was in that head a soul of proof which made its owner greater than his fortunes, and when he gave it me, and I looked straight into his eyes, before striking; then it was I discovered I was a child, and could not vanquish the spirit of him who slew my brother, the Whirling Cloud."

"How did it come to pass?" inquired Couteau-croche: strongly interested in the wild adventure, and surveying the person of the speaker with attention, "were one to judge of a creature's pasture by the condition of its hide, he might opine thou hast not fared sumptuously of late,

my friend; and that there were thorns in the path."

"There is a true scent of war about him," observed Salexis to the young Mohawk, in a confidential whisper; "by my fathers, a stalwart brave."

"Listen!" said Tatunga, cutting them short with an emphasis; the son of the Medicine Bow's schemed a scheme and took his medicine-dog one day, and rode, and rode, and rode until he reached the country of his enemies.

"He was an eagle of the hills swooping for prey; every thought of his was an arrow in the vitals of the Scarred Arms—he hated them!

"Now by the manitou accursed, he fell like an owl in the day time, blind into an ambush, and his medicine dog of war was pierced dead, and he himself hurled stunned upon the ground.

"He woke up a bound captive to the Scarred Arms: he could have eaten his own heart with bitterness—it is enough.

"Now, into the lodge where they put me, at the village, came a man masked and armed, and cutting the thongs that fastened me he said, 'Come!' and when I demanded where, he answered, 'to the prairie:' meaning that I was free. Then he took me to his lodge and gave me food and put me upon his medicine dog, for I was crippled from the tightness of the fastenings, and walked beside me, and said no word.

"It was in a solitary dell that the man stopped and said, 'Son of the Dahcota knowest thou wherefore a Scarred Arm has bought thee off from the stake of fire and done this thing? Behold!'

"And taking the buffalo mask from his face, I saw before me the slayer of the Whirling Cloud: a man without a scalp, which I had won.

"It is, said I, that we finish the game."

"Even so, he replied; what is a brave without his hair?"

"Then they sat down, those scalpless ones, and played head against head, and Tatunga won.

"'Thou has luck to-day, brother,' said the Scarred Arm with a smile, and he drew his knife and gave it to Tatunga. 'Let me talk to the Master first,' said he, 'then will I be ready.'

"And Tatunga said 'agreed.'

"Then the man, whose head was not his own, stepped aside and sang his death song, and came back, and knelt before his enemy, saying, 'Strike!'

"And Tatunga did so, watching his eyes; and they never winked or shut, but grew bigger in the ball, like a panther's, looking at him.

"Now, who can say after that he is a warrior?"

"It was a cunning stratagem of the Scarred Arm after all, for his death look was a triumph!

"Tatunga as he beheld his staring eyes, and

how they never flinched, felt as it were, a worm crawling into his heart; and for the first time in his life he was afraid.

“Then he took the arms and medicine dog and trophy, and rode, and rode, and rode, fasting until now.”

“Tatunga is sick; he will paint his face black and humble himself before the Master. The Scarred Arms are no dogs!”

With a moody scowl the fierce warrior repacked the head, tightened his horse-gear, and prepared to depart. All at once a thought recurred to him, and turning abruptly towards the group, he said:

“The foundling of the Whirling Cloud sits yonder with the stranger’s daughter. The path of my brother leads far from the country of the Medicine-Bows; how is this?”

Conrad then explained to him what the reader already knows, and after assuring himself, from her own lips, of Heladee’s free concurrence in the arrangement, he expressed his acquiescence, bade her a frank farewell, inquired the shortest direction to strike upon the village trail, leaped on horseback, waved his long spear in general salutation, and dashed off again like a messenger of fate, tearing up the stones and shrubs and hurling them from the hoofs of his charger in his headlong flight.

"A man of rock, by the mass! a resolute devil," observed Couteau-croche, decisively, cutting off a plug of the darling weed and planting it in his jaw; "I could not have had the heart to take the Scarred Arm at his word. Heads are not things to be played away like leaden bullets; it was a stupid business altogether."

"I cant say that," opined Sewantus; "what the Scarred Arm said was just; a brave is nobody without his scalp-lock. He had lost his honour, you see, and wagered his life to gain it back again. Sewantus-walie would not have claimed the forfeit, nevertheless; he would have sworn a friendship with an enemy so honest-minded and brave, for he had a Maqua soul."

"He was worthy of a better fate, that is clear," said Conrad, sadly; "the law of vengeance makes men like tigers, and hides their human natures under a mantle of blood. Alas! when will the time come in which there will be no more war?"

"Ay," echoed Salexis, with a peculiar smile, nodding affirmatively as he spoke, "when will, that time be?"

At this moment a plaintive whine was heard in the recesses of the wood, at the edge of which they were.

"Hark!" said Heladec to Ellen, as they sat together; "knowest thou that voice, my sister?"

It is the medicine-wolf's* cry. Now for a certainty will we see strangers ere sundown; it is always so."

* See note at a previous page.

CHAPTER XIX.

PERIL—BATTLE—AND REVENGE.

As soon as the horses were done feeding, they continued on, and some hours later passed a remarkable looking bluff, situated upon the verge of one of those singular valleys so common in the prairies, hollowed out as by a mighty flood in some past age, and bordered by irregular precipices which towered up to the level of the table-land. This bottom was covered with long tangled grass which had already lost its green hue and become parched by the heat and drought of the season.

Sewantus pointed to a conspicuous object upon the eminence just mentioned, to which the eyes of the party were immediately directed.

This was an Indian fort, such as was often encountered in that region of continual war,

though in this instance, a rare one; the material used was stone instead of wood; and the structure rose in the form of a small circular tower with a conical roof, not much higher than a horse's head from the ground. The travellers little thought then how soon it was destined to become their place of asylum and most grievous trial.

The ground now became uneven, and the weather being close and hazy, giving every indication of an approaching storm, they began to think of seeking for a convenient place to encamp, although the sun was still high, when Salexis, being in the van, gave a note of alarm, and leaping from his horse knelt down in close scrutiny of the soil.

"A fresh trail, as I live!" exclaimed Couteau-croche, as he recognized those indubitable impressions which like the rattle of the snake brings the wayfarer often to a stand in the prairies, and forewarns him of the proximity of a foe into whose toils he might else fall unconsciously and perish; the prints of horses' feet in a steady line. "What does it say, Salexis? thou art quick-witted at the eye-craft; for myself, I see many mustang hoofs leading away to the hollow yonder, that is all."

"There is more," said Salexis, rising composedly from his survey and pointing with one hand

to the trail, while he displayed the fingers of the other twice, to designate the number ten. "A band of not less passed this way but now, for the ground is still hot. There may be enemies waiting for us within reach of a war-whoop; the grass is only beginning to rise in the tracks. It is time to unsling bows."

"Gracious powers, look there!" cried Conrad, with a voice of awe; and above the undulating roll of the plain in front, appeared suspended in air, the phantom shapes of several horsemen in rapid motion, recrossing their line of route in a direction contrary to that of the suspicious trail.

"Ugh-hoo!" ejaculated Salexis, dropping his arms and cowering slightly in the excess of his superstitious terror; while Couteau-croche crossed himself instinctively, and was struck speechless by the apparition. "Ugh-hoo! the dead people are abroad. A warrior cannot fight when there are manes in the path; he has no medicine against them."

"It is only the mist-shadow of things underneath," said Heladee, calmly, coming speedily to the relief of her companions. "We do often behold such fantasies in the air of the plains, when it is very still; for then it is like a lake which paints images of the clouds and trees, that is all."

This simple explanation of the phenomenon, a species of mirage, not uncommon at certain seasons in those elevated plateaus; brought the whole of them to an immediate consciousness of their peril.

It was evident that they were watched by a hostile party which even then was seeking a convenient spot in the neighbourhood, from whence to pounce clandestinely upon them as they passed.

"The odds are against us," said Conrad, seizing the bridle of Ellen's horse and drawing her towards him; "if we give battle openly perchance we suffer."

"That must not be," said Sewantus, firmly.

"To the fort! To the fort!" shouted Couteau-croche, with sudden energy; "the bluff is not two bow-shots behind, and will give us shelter, God willing, both from the wrath of the weather and these accursed red-skins. Back to the bluff, comrades, without delay!"

This suggestion was hailed with one accord, and turning their horses' heads they hurried back at full speed to the lofty prominence which was yet visible in the rear.

It was a providential measure certainly, for scarcely had they arrived at the foot of the sloping acclivity, ere a savage yell broke the stillness of the solitude with a thousand echoes,

and like a pack of wolves in full cry, a troop of horsemen rose over a neighbouring swell and came charging down upon them with lances lowered.

Pushing their steeds, however, with whip and goad up the steep ascent, the travellers secured themselves within the welcome precincts of the little fortress on its brow before they suffered molestation from their pursuers; and the latter seeing that they had failed in their design, and that the party was in a position which more than compensated for a wide disparity of numbers, abandoned the mode of attack and disappeared among the cotton-groves of the bottom adjoining, after making a rapid *reconnaissance* of the ground. At this instant, the sun which since noon had been obscured, sent forth a stream of ruddy light that touched the cliffs, groves, and rolling swells of the landscape with a huelike fire.

"Heladee was right," thought Ellen. "This is a world full of mysteries, and we see every thing dimly as through a glass. Who could have believed the prophecy of the medicine-wolf would come true? Verily, we have seen strangers, and the sun is not yet gone down!"

They had now ample leisure to scan the curious place in which they were. This, as already stated, was a circular stone building, thrown up

probably at no distant period by some party for protection against a superior force, for it was in good preservation, roofed and creneled, and capable of containing a much larger number of individuals than such as now appropriated for themselves and horses the space within its walls.

The *voyageur* expressed his satisfaction at the strength of the position, and aided by the others, piled fragments of rock across the narrow entrance until it was closed by a barricade that reached as high as a man's breast; when, well ensured against the emergency of a sudden attack, he set about ascertaining the resources of the little garrison, regulated the watch: secured from a clump of cotton-trees that grew at the foot of the ridge, bark enough to supply the horses with fodder for several days: filled their water-skins with water which sprang from a cleft in the rock hard by; and in fact took every precaution that either his veteran experience or the sagacity of his associates suggested in making ready for the siege which he knew they would have to undergo.

Meanwhile Conrad unpacked the camp equipage, and with the help of Ellen and Heladee, made a comfortable lodging-place for the whole party in a part of the fortalice the furthest removed from the horses.

He had little ado in quieting the fears of his

gentle assistants, for both of them were too well used to alarms to feel much intimidated by the serious aspect of affairs. Indeed, the Indian maid seemed to gather enthusiasm by the occasion, for she moved and spoke with an air of energy and decision, and more than once Conrad paused in astonishment at her altered manner, and saw that her eye was flashing with unwonted fire, while a curl of proud disdain was on her lip, as in opposition to some rebel weakness she strove to quell.

The lofty summit upon which they were, over-looked like a watch-tower, the valley below, and formed on the opposite side to that which led up from the prairie a perpendicular precipice that shot beyond its general boundary, and intersected a portion of the luxuriant brake of the sheltered bottom land. It was well chosen therefore as a point of observation as well as of defence : and to give the earliest notice of any menacing movement on the part of their assailants, a sentinel was posted in an advantageous place, whence unseen himself, he could scan with readiness every portion of the ground in the vicinity of the bluff, either in the grassy valley or on the higher and less fertile level of the prairie. But Salaxis, who took the first turn of duty, clambered in over the barricade in the twilight, saying that he had not seen anything larger than a leaf move, and

that a storm was gathering in the sunset; and, ere long, the wind arose and blew in violent gusts over the bluff, whistling drearily through the crannies of the fort, and the rain poured heavily down, accompanied by heavy thunder and some blinding flashes. This disturbance of the elements was only temporary, notwithstanding, and soon passed over, for when Couteau-croche, who was on guard, looking out at the stars through the opening in the doorway, roused Sewantus with the intimation that it was after midnight, the sky was entirely cloudless, and partially illuminated by the moon, then in the middle of its second quarter. The *voyageur* in another minute was asleep in the vacated bed, while the Mohawk, standing erect beside the entrance, commenced his watch.

For more than an hour he kept his position as motionless as the stone against which he leaned. Every thing was still. The wind had lulled, and except an occasional respiration from the slumberers, whose shapes were barely visible in the scanty rays that found their way through the embrasures, nothing broke the dead monotony of the night.

Sewantus felt it not, however; his heart was filled to overflowing with restless thoughts and voices that spoke alone to him in the silence of

the midnight watch, and kept him busily employed. And from time to time his eye glanced towards the place where the females reposed, and lingered upon the curving outlines of Ellen's form which was more distinctly traced out than those of the rest by a pencil of moonlight that obtained admittance through a loophole under which she lay.

The weather was sultry, and the maiden used no covering over her ordinary dress, the folds of which trembled in the silvery beam as with each breath of the fair sleeper they rose and fell.

Ha! what was that? The light above the maiden is suddenly obscured. Could it be by a cloud? No, for through the other apertures it still shines in a steady stream.

Sewantus held his breath, his heart stood still, for a long naked arm protruded itself cautiously through the loophole, touched the round shoulder of the unconscious Ellen, and then was gradually withdrawn.

Sewantus recovered breath with a spasm, and the blood rushed to his brow. Once more the human limb entered the aperture; but this time there was a blade in its clenched extremity, for it caught the light with a flash as it hovered over the breast of the sleeper to make sure of its aim.

Sewantus crept up like carcajou, and seized the

arm in his grip; dashing at the same time his butcher-knife through the fleshy part between the bones, and transfixing it into a fissure of the wall; then, inspired by a feeling of uncontrollable tenderness for the designed victim, he folded his arm around and moved her gently to one side. In the act, the cheek of the Indian rested for a moment against her's; but for a moment only, and with scarcely pressure sufficient to disturb Ellen, when he sprang up and uttered a cry.

The echo reverberated still within the cave-like building, when each individual was on his feet and prepared for the attack.

After a few desperate wrenches, to tear itself from the double bond that held it fast, the strange arm ceased to struggle in the grasp of the Mohawk, and the weapon, a knife of copper, fell from its relaxed fingers upon the ground.

"A light! A light!" cried Couteau-croche. "What have you got there—a snake?"

"A mocassin snake," was the calm reply; "He was going to bite, but I seized him behind the tongue. There is no power in him now."

With a few sparks struck from a flint, a candle made of the comb of the wild bee mixed with bear's grease, was quickly lighted, and revealed to every one the cause of the alarm; at the same time Sewantus gave a guttural, expressive of

extreme surprise, for the arm he held all at once began to give way, and slid entirely within the opening: and with a shudder of horror he relinquished his grasp, and it dropped, severed and lifeless on the floor.

“*Tonnerre de Dieu!* This fledgling of the Devil has preserved his scalp and left us his claw instead,” said the *voyageur*; “He was a cunning craw fish, to shed it in that manner; but I doubt if another will grow out in its place. He has purchased his life dearly.”

“I have hunted,” observed Salexis, sagely; “and I never thought any live creature more human than a beaver, could have the heart to escape in that fashion. Many times, on visiting the traps, in the morning, have I found the steel sprung, with a beaver’s paw caught in it and gnawed clean off. Do warriors practise such devices in this land?”

“I cannot tell,” answered Heladee, to whom the speaker referred, averting her face from the bleeding limb: “The Scarred Arms have hatchets and can use them, even on themselves, in extremity, it appears; they have no hearts!”

“Heladee is right,” remarked Sewantus; the member is lopped through flesh and bone, at a blow; and see, there are the marks of his nation, scored across it.”

This was really the case, for it was the left arm, and bore upon it several cicatrices, such as were known to constitute the distinguishing badge of the enemies of the Medicine Bows.

"Let us make a sortie," cried Conrad; "we may yet recover the villain spy, and chastise his confederates, should any of them be lurking near."

"Move not one of ye, at your peril!" said Couteau-croche imperatively; barring the entrance with his body: our strength lies within these walls, for the present. As for the Scarred Arm, he will not repeat his experiment this moon, I reckon. He has got his dose, and won't have the least stomach for fighting, you may be sure."

"Hark!" broke in Salexis, abruptly, as a long wolf-like howl rose from the defile that led into the lower grounds; "The Scarred Arm is calling for help. The life is running out of him fast."

"His brethren will gather round him at the cry, like turkey buzzards at the scent of blood," rejoined the *coyageur*; "Let us plug the crenels, braves, and remain in our den: none will venture in upon grizzly bears when they have their eyes open and smell treason!

"True! true! stop up the loop-holes; it was a stupid oversight and might have done woeful mischief," said the others: and they proceeded at once

to follow the advice of the *voyageur*, and made the walls of the fort both eye and arrow proof, in every part except the door, where a single opening remained: through this meanwhile, a lighted flambeau of bark was thrown, which shed a bright glare over the vicinity and secured them from a surprise.

They remained on the alert, until daybreak, without further molestation, but they were assured, by a savage yell that rose from the bosom of the vale, some time after the escape by self amputation, of the daring adventurer whose return it announced: that they would have more trouble in getting rid of the malignant crew who had beset them thus early, upon their homeward journey.

In fact, no sooner was daylight fairly abroad in the plains and one of the party posted again, as a sentinel, on the brow of the bluff, than he uttered a warning cry, and rushed back into the stone citadel, with a bound: and almost in the same instant, the enemy broke from the copse-wood on the ascent, and assailed the fort with fury, discharging a shower of arrows at each loop-hole in the wall, and climbing on the roof for the purpose of tearing the stone work asunder, to effect an entrance from above.

But the material was more weighty than they

had anticipated, and watching their opportunity, the besieged, with spears and arrows, put two of them *hors-de-combat*, in the act: when the rest retreated with their disabled companions, yelling like fiends with mortification and rage.

After a short pause, which enabled the party in the fort to recover breath and repair the damages in the roof, the Scarred Arms were again upon them: but this time they chose a different mode of proceeding. Riding up the slope of the bluff on their horses, each bore in his arm a faggot of long grass, from the bottom meadows; these they lighted from a torch which one carried, and dashing boldly forward, threw them with precision one after the other, as they passed, over the barricade of the doorway into the midst of the little garrison.

The stratagem was well conceived, rapidly executed, and nearly fatal to the party; for the interior of the stone retreat was immediately converted into a flaming furnace, by the combustible material thrown into it, which blazed up and filled the confined space with intolerable heat and smoke; so that they only escaped by wrapping themselves up in buffalo skins and applying their mouths to the loop-holes: which preserved their clothes from the fire and themselves from suffocation. But the horses were less fortunate, and screaming

with pain and terror, dashed their hoofs against the stone, in their frantic efforts to break through.

“*Sacre Tonnerre!* this will never do,” cried Couteau-croche, when the grass was consumed and the smoke began to clear off. “Better to die like men, in the open air, than be stifled here like musk-rats in a hole. Hold back the mustangs while I break down the barrier!”

Better leave them and the women within, and do our work outside the doorway,” suggested Sewantus.

“Good! Good!” shouted his companions, and in another minute the four leaped the barricade and stood exposed against their adversaries, who, now reduced to seven in number, were already dismounted and enconcealed in a thicket, within bow-shot of the fort.

From this they now began to shoot their arrows in quick succession, and though they made shift to defend themselves from these missiles, in some degree, with their buffalo shields, both Sewantus and Couteau-croche were struck simultaneously, one in the leg and the other in the arm, but not very severely, nor before another foeman had been made to bite the dust by a well-aimed shot from the carbine of the latter: who discharged his last bullet with a curse, and flung the useless weapon after it at the enemy, as they

broke impetuously from the cover and rushed towards them.

Uttering ejaculations of astonishment at the explosion and its effect, the Scarred Arms, paused : but the leader, nothing intimidated, urged them on with vehement gestures, and regaining confidence, they raised a fierce whoop and followed him to the attack.

This leader was of a tall, gaunt figure, fantastically painted, and wearing a mask formed of the skin of a buffaloe's head, with the horns and tail attached, which gave him an uncouth satyr-like appearance.

Salexis stepped forth boldly to receive him, and they engaged in single combat, while their associates closed in a body, with knives, maces, and shields.

He was no match for the Abenake warrior, that painted foeman, though he leaped with wonderful agility from side to side to evade his blows, and wielded a stone hatchet with considerable rapidity and skill ; and more than once the bone-spiked mace of Salexis came in close proximity to his body, when, with a crushing sweep, the blow intended for the head struck obliquely against the horns, and the fastenings of the mask giving way, it fell to the ground and disclosed the features of Bizon-ko-kok-has !

The energy was paralyzed in the warrior's limbs, and the manly spirit in his heart when he beheld the ill-omened visage of the sorcerer glaring maliciously upon him. The weapon fell from his nerveless hand, the buckler from his drooping arm: and shrinking back, he permitted the superstition of his race to overmaster those strong faculties which no ordinary opposition could either weaken or subdue.

The other, observing the discomfiture of his opponent, seized the advantage, and with a sudden spring darted forward and buried his stone axe in his naked shoulder. The keen edge clove through muscle, clavicle, and lung, and Salexis fell like a riven oak to the ground.

"He! he!" screamed the sorcerer, in the language of the Abenake, flourishing his tomahawk with a gesture of triumph; "the son of the canoe-men has lost his way! He must not come to the sunset so far, searching for a bird that mocks—The Medicine Owl has wings!"

It was his last speech, for a missile cut the air with a sharp whiz, and smote him full upon the brow. It was the war club of Sewantus, and its errand was death; the skull crushed like a calabash, and Bizon-ko-kok-has with a groan measured his length on the moss, beside the countryman he had slain.

Yet Sewantus, who with Conrad and the *voyageur* was battling furiously, within a few paces, avenged his fallen comrade at the risk of his own life: for being wounded, as we have said, his footing was unsteady, and in the very act of hurling the deadly weapon, he lost his balance and fell; and before he could either rise or draw his knife an enemy was upon him, and he had to ward off his rapid knife-thrusts with his buckler.

One minute more and his fate would have been sealed; the rest were hotly pressed, and cut off from him by the fluctuations of the strife; the blood of the Maqua began to flow from each limb, his only defence was beaten aside—his breast lay bare to the stroke.

The Scarred Arm with a look of triumph, fixed his knee on the thigh of the prostrate warrior, and raised his weapon deliberately, when a woman's shriek rang over the field, and Heladee, springing from the doorway of the fort, with a buffalo robe, flung it over the Scarred Arm, whose back was towards her, and threw him back.

Like a spring released from pressure, Sewantus, weak as he was, rose up, and darted upon his foe, who had grasped the girl by the arm, and was struggling to free himself from the folds of the skin. With a grasp and a wild convulsion, all at once he ceased his efforts; the blade of the

Mohawk was true to its mark—the wars of the Scarred Arm at an end!

Seeing the fate of their companions, and now mustering only four, the enemy lost courage and retreated with a cry of despair: unpursued by the heroic little band, who, bleeding, exhausted, and overwhelmed with anguish for the loss they had sustained, let them depart without even drawing a bowstring to impede their flight.

Dragging themselves with the air of defeated men, back to the fort, they consoled Ellen with the intelligence of the departure of their fierce assailants, and sought her assistance, with that of the brave Indian maiden, to bind up the flesh wounds, from which not one of the three survivors was exempt, in the desperate conflict that had taken place.

All at once, a whoop of defiance was heard from the lower grounds, and looking down, they beheld the foemen sweeping along, on their departure up the valley, and making insulting gestures to them as they passed out of arrow shot, beneath the bluff; the long grass parting from their trail, like ripples from a vessel's prow, cloven by the chests of their horses as they forced their way steadily through the sea of herbage.

“By the holy cross!” cried the *voyageur*, springing to his feet, his face livid with passion,

and every nerve aroused and quivering at the sight, "that bravado shall cost thee dearly, thou brood of hell!" And running towards the spot where the resinous pine torch used by the enemy lay smouldering still upon the ground: he caught it up, drew a faggot of bark from the fort, rushed with it to the cliff: and setting it in a blaze, threw it with all his might from the edge, two hundred feet down into the valley below.

"It is our turn now!" hissed Couteau-croche between his teeth: "let us see who will stand fire best: honest men or dogs. The wind is south-west, and the hollow heads to the sunrise. *Gare!* ye accursed. There is a blood-hound at your heels—hot and strong!"

The effect was terrific. At first a small red tongue darted in a puff of smoke from amongst the dry grass and weeds, a belch of flame succeeded: it expanded like a train of gunpowder over the vicinity; it caught the impulse of the breeze, and spreading out like the wings of the aurora, rushed with inconceivable rapidity, crackling and howling like a tempest up the narrow vale: devouring the groves, thickets, and every green thing in its passage; swirling up into the air, in columns of spiral flame, and inundating the meadows between the cliffs, with a sea of raging fire.

Wild animals, scared from their retreats, sprang roaring away from the devouring element, and the prairie hen rose screaming from the brake, and disappeared in the thick smoke that obscured the atmosphere above.

The ominous sound reached the ears of the fugitives, and looking back they beheld the flood of fire rolling on, avenger-like, in their rear. Dispersing in unspeakable terror, one lashed his horse onward, in the hope of outstripping the conflagration: another dashed to and fro across the bottom, through the copsewood and tangled pea-vines, and breasted the sides of the precipices in the endeavour to reach the upper prairie: while another again forsook his horse and strove to scale the perpendicular walls that imprisoned them on either side.

But faster than the fleetest steed that snuffs the prairie air, came roaring on the desolating storm. It curled over them; it licked them round with its greedy tongues: it swept on in a mighty surge that threw its jets far above the rocky steeps, and fired the plains beyond. Could vengeance satisfy, then were the travellers consoled, for the destruction of those who had assailed them was now fearfully complete.

“Hot and strong!” muttered the *voyageur*, repeating his last words as he witnessed the awful

result with stern rigidity of muscle. "It was a lucky idea and did the business well." Then, with a quick revulsion of feeling at the thought of his dead comrade, he threw himself down upon his face and wept.

CHAPTER XX.

He cometh ! Death is here———

————— How cold the dew
Starts o'er my temples ! Wipe it not away.
Shame on your tears ! Leave me alone with Death !
For I will meet him as a brave man should,
And hurl defiance at him.—MRS. SIGOURNEY.

THEY were gathered around the form of the stricken hunter, who lay yet where he had fallen senseless, at the sorcerer's blow.

Salexis was not dead: and he revived after a time, but only to prepare for that mysterious sleep which we call death, and the red-man, a journey: but which both believe to be a transition to some happier state.

Salexis was wounded beyond the leech's skill, and passing gradually away.

In speechless woe the members of the little group gazed upon the faithful companion of their

past toils, from whom they were now destined to part, and strove by supporting his head, to assuage the pangs he was suffering ;—for at each breath, the blood burst forth mixed with froth from the wounded lung ;—the axe having penetrated the texture of that most delicate tissue, upon the soundness of which, as upon a gossamer web that a touch annihilates, depends so entirely the precarious life of man.

The simple-minded, the equable, the brave and unpretending Salexis, whose worth appeared to grow more fully into view, and add a deeper poignancy to their sorrow, now that they were about to lose him; lay as a soldier should, stricken, but not disconsolate, upon his last field.

The glory of the sun is revealed to us more fully at its setting than when, true to its allotted trust, it kept the even tenor of its way. The work of the forester was done. “I will go to sleep,” said he: “the earth is my mother; it is good to rest upon her bosom.”

“Bring the paint, brothers!” The dying man spoke with vigour, though he quelled a convulsive tremor that shook the muscles of his face and forehead, by a mighty effort of the will, and could only converse in the intervals of pain:—

“Give me my knife and bow! Salexis must appear like a warrior before his fathers.”

They did in silence what he required, and Sewantus kneeling down, applied vermilion to the face of the hunter, in the manner of the eastern tribes, and placed his weapons in his hands.

"He is ready for the journey now," he murmured, with a placid look;—"The path of the sunset is long." "Sewantus," said he, after a pause,—eyeing the young man with tender regard, "thou art a true son of the forest people. I will say to thy ancients,—be at peace; there are braves still among the Maquas. When I am gone away, take my bear-collar and wear it for a memorial-belt, telling always of the war-path in which Salexis lies."

After another interval of suffering, the wounded man rallied, and asked in a strong voice—

"Couteau-croche? where art thou?"

"Here," answered the *voyageur*, moving round in front of his comrade, and waiting anxiously for his words, as he inquired, "What cheer, brother?"

"Have we not hunted?" demanded Salexis, with a serene smile.

"Ay, that have we," answered the other, half choking with his emotions, and unable to look upon his questioner, who rejoined:—

"Very well. Some day we will go on another hunt together, up in the clear sky yonder. They say that country is full of game. I will soon see."

I have to go there now. In a little, thou wilt hear my last song of travel."

Then calling the females, who came to his side with shrouded faces, he took a hearty leave of them, bidding Heladee to be cheerful hearted, and Ellen "to talk to the Man above about him, sometimes; but not to shed tears, either of them: they were the sap of the core and should not be wasted, for he had heard say," he told them, "that an Indian cup-full of tears shortened life by a moon."

To Conrad he gave a solemn commission, which he said he would entrust only to his best-loved friend: as he regarded the fulfilment of its injunction a matter of serious importance to his peace in that shadowy realm to which he was so speedily hastening.

"Cut off my scalp-lock," said he, "and carry it back with thee to the sunrise, and if so be that thou goest not thyself to the country of the Abenakes, find some honest man travelling that way, and let him deliver it into the hands of my people. Then they will say, Salaxis died honourably, and has sen this lock of pride, that it may be placed with his fathers' bones, among the graves on the Penobscot: the river of rolling waters,—let it be so. Wilt thou do this, my son, truly and well?—I must soon go."

Conrad, with a bursting heart, promised him that he would comply faithfully with his wishes : and having thus settled all his worldly affairs, the simple-minded warrior commenced a low chant, in his native tongue ; low at first, inarticulate and broken, but soon swelling out clear and full, with an energy that appeared to triumph, for the time, over pain and debility, and to retard the progress of the fell tyrant that was wrapping him in his coils.

“ He is making his breast clean before the Master,” said Couteau-eroche, who alone knew the dialect of the Abenake ; “ he is singing his death song,” said he in a low voice to Conrad ; “ it is the fashion of a red-skin to confess his triumphs before he dies.”

“ Listen,” said Sewantus solemnly ; “ such a brave should talk well to the spirit to whom he goes.”

“ He does ! by the holy cross, he does ! ” replied the *voyageur*, with emphasis. “ I never knew he had done so many manly deeds as those whereof he speaks. He was no braggart, this poor Salexis. A plain soldier, comrades. Ay,—an honest man.”

“ Ha ! ” exclaimed the warrior with a powerful expiration abruptly terminating his strain, and looking steadily, and with a mien of dauntless resolution, straight before him :—

“Stand off, brothers! back! back! I will meet him like a man.—He shall not make a woman of Salexis! His heart is strong!”—and, as if in conflict with an imaginary foe, he rose half up and made several thrusts with his knife in the air.

It was the last flash of the taper. In another moment he fell heavily back, murmuring the Great Spirit’s name. A dull shade passed over him—he was dead.

* * * * *

“What incomprehensible means brought thee unto this fatal spot, ill-starred and ungovernable man?” soliloquised Conrad, as, some hours after the melancholy scene we have described, he bent over the remains of the sorcerer, whose features had softened down, and lost much of their animal-like ferocity and cunning, in the calm placidity of death.

“But whatever the power once given to thy unscrupulous keeping, it has deserted thee at last. And with thee, the evil influence that hung for years like mildew upon our fortunes, is for ever quelled. Take with thee the gloom and anguish of the past. Bury them in thy grave,—practiser of forbidden rites; we can spare them well.”

It was not to be wondered at that he should attribute the presence of the detected poisoner, whom he supposed to be safely incarcerated in

Lahnzel, to the effects of magic alone ; particularly in an age notorious for its religious belief in witchcraft, and evil spirits of various kinds. Conrad knew not that the conjuror had made his escape by the most simple means, and followed upon their trail ; that he had stolen the horse missed in crossing the mountains, and fallen in, subsequently, with a war party of Scarred Arms, whom he induced, with the hope of plunder and the assurance of an easy triumph, to dog the footsteps of the travellers, and fall upon them unawares, at the first convenient opportunity ; a catastrophe which the remarkable mirage alone enabled the weaker party to avoid, and caused that change in their own proceedings which terminated in complete disaster : as we have seen.

The night following this eventful day was one of distress and watching—the most melancholy they had ever yet spent in the prairies. The mourners were alone with the dead : and those who might have slept but for very wretchedness of mind, could not from the pain of their wounds, which began to stiffen and inflame. And yet, through the long dismal night, they seldom spoke to one another ; for conversation appeared sacrilege in the o'erbrooding silence and indefinable presence, which they could not put by. Who is there that hath not felt that same vague shudder,—

that "sense which lifts the hair from the scalp to the ankle;" that awful consciousness which absorbs our very being in its intensity, during the still hours of vigil when the sleeper of the room is—Death!

The darkness under the clouds was like a pall through which the moon's feeble rays could not penetrate: but here and there, upon the prairie, a great hydra-like ribbon of flame showed where the conflagration still raged, among the short growth of the upper levels. On the horizon, this phenomenon assumed the appearance of a bow of lurid fire, spanning the black sky, caused by an elevation at that point, to the summit of which the consuming element had gradually crept, leaving ashes, smoke, and desolation in its track.

They buried their comrade under the earthen floor of the Indian fort, with his arms and accoutrements, and provisioned as for a march; and said over him a prayer. They lingered by the sepulchre of their friend, and carved his name carefully, with a knife's point upon the stone wall. They mounted their horses once more, and went their way sadly, to the east, over the blackened waste. But oftentimes they would turn round to take a fresh farewell of the long-conspicuous eminence, and its little tower, which was now consecrated in their eyes, less for the shelter it

had afforded them, than for the precious deposit it contained.

Like many a bluff in that vast desert, it had served the double purpose of a fortress and a tomb.

"Was it for this, alas! that I took thee from thy home—to die in a strange land?" thought Conrad, with bitter self-upbraiding, sinking his head upon his breast as he rode dejectedly along: "Oh, my faithful companion, where will I find again thy living likeness—There was that about thy nature which the dwellers of the cities have long since lost—It bore upon it, as on a coin, the stamp of the Creator, fresh and clear, showing it to be sterling gold."

A pattern for a soldier and an upright man wert thou—my first Indian friend. When I forget thee, may this arm be palsied and my best leg stricken down! Alas! that after all our wanderings, it should end thus! This last trial is the newest, st we have yet borne. God aid us, or we perish!"

CHAPTER XXI.

AN UNEXPECTED DISCLOSURE.

ONE evening, about a week subsequently, the travellers pitched their tents in a verdant nook upon one of the branches of the Missouri, across which their course lay, and after the usual duties of encamping for the night were completed, Sewantus intimated, secretly, a desire to speak with Conrad: upon which, the latter drew aside with his friend, who, as soon as they were out of ear-shot, paused, folded his arms gravely, looked intently at the ground, then in the face of his companion, and demanded abruptly:—

“Have we not been as brothers, by day and by night, now for more than sixty and ten moons and six? Does the son of Ka-na-ro-kos speak with a tongue that is not forked?”

“He does, surely,” replied Conrad, surprised

at the question as well as the earnestness of the speaker.

“Then is it just that there should be anything hidden between us? That what belongs only to one, the other should crave after and think upon, continually, and dissemble in his conduct all the while—like a man who looks one way and goes another; is this the duty of a brave man and a friend?”

“Certainly not: but wherefore do you ask it of me, Sewantus?”

“That my brother may know him he has trusted. He sees before him a man with a double heart; one who took pride to himself because he was a Maqua—for the Maquas are honourable men—and nevertheless, has done this thing.”

“What mean you, Sewantus?” cried Conrad, with unfeigned astonishment.

“Listen,” replied Sewantus, taking a few strides aside, and coming rapidly back and confronting the other with a disordered expression of countenance, which, as he spoke, he made an effort to quell:—

“Does my brother remember the day when he who has gone from us was delivered from the torture and taken into the friendship of the Maquas? Very well; that day Sewantus-walie fell sick by looking upon a strange flower, which

his brethren said they had picked up by the salt water, in the country of Onanthio.

“From that time, he languished inwardly. there was no cure for the complaint; it was at the heart of the tree—it was in his soul!

“For many suns, he fought against this unknown enemy, and sought to overthrow him—not from without, but from within. What could he do against treachery? It possessed the strong places, and prevailed.

“But did he fly, this lost man, from the dangerous thing that had done this mischief?—He did not! Did he stay and seek to brave it out, like a braggart and a fool?—He did!

“Though he knew all this time that it lived for one more worthy of it than he was, he took a fancy to the flower, and to the air it breathed: and trusting to his manhood, he remained—madman as he was—and his sickness took deeper root and eat into his heart!

“He stood at mid-day, and saw no sun in the sky. He slept not, and yet beheld no star. His eyeballs were turned within, and there everything was whirlwind and fire!

“Now he who owned the flower missed it one morning, and was sorry, and wandered wearily up and down, asking those he met if they had seen a stray water-lily in the land; and Sewantus

said to him, 'Brother, let us go together upon the track. We shall find that which is lost after many days.'

"So they went, and were as brothers; and many moons waned, and they were lucky, and discovered the flower. And all this time Sewantus-walie kept his sickness a secret, and the other had faith in him, and knew not of the danger that lurked about him. And Sewantus-walie felt tempted many times to do wrong, for his sickness made a fool of him. And yet he spoke no word to put his brother on his guard. That was deceitful. That was not worthy a warrior of and an honest man!"

Astounded, alarmed, and pained beyond measure by this avowal, Conrad sat down without a word in reply, and placed his hand across his forehead in grave reflection.

There was nothing enigmatical in the language of his friend. What he had never for an instant suspected was now made clearly manifest by several circumstances which, trivial and insignificant in themselves, he had hardly noticed at the time. The frequent moodiness and abstraction of his companion, his unconquerable reserve in the presence of Ellen, which the latter had more than once complained of: the unceasing solicitude he showed in everything that related to her comfort

and security since the commencement of the journey, all bore witness to the truth of the strange confession he had just heard; enough, we must admit, to fan the spark of jealousy in a colder breast than his, and to throw an insuperable barrier in the way of their future intercourse, had either of them been of the ordinary stamp.

Conrad, however, was not the one to allow his personal feelings to triumph long over his better judgment, and prevent him from doing full justice to the ingenuousness and sacrifices of his friend. The shock was severe, but every unworthy reflection soon gave place to a sentiment of admiration for the generous rival, who could thus lay bare his most secret thoughts, and inflict the torture of humiliation upon himself, simply for virtue's sake; actuated by a severity of principle that scorned duplicity, and revolted at the merest shadow of dishonour.

He called to mind then the observations which escaped the lips of the young Mohawk on that memorable morning when first they sat out, years since, in search of the lost Ellen, by the lake of the Indian village. They had impressed him singularly at the time, but each word was pregnant with especial meaning now. He repeated them over slowly to himself. "You have a good hope left to make you strong. Those only, without that,

have cause to be troubled. For such men there is but one way to act—they must harden their hearts to stone, and so pass honourably along the track in which they travel.” It was the language of one himself a disciple of that dreary school which cements, with the philosophy of the stoic the wounds of a broken heart.

He had struggled, endured, persisted in his course, without a single murmur. He had aided his more fortunate rival in the accomplishment of his plans, though they were diametrically opposite to his own natural desires; all this he had done freely, and without a particle of hope to cheer him on, or any prospect of ulterior benefit to himself; and now he, the scrupulous friend, came to humble himself before him, and denounce his conduct as unworthy, because he had never made him a confidant of this delicate and unpropitious love!

Conrad rose at once, and held out his hand with a glowing cheek and a cordial manner, saying,

“Thou hast been sorely tried, my true friend; the secret were better untold. Let there be no more words about it; my faith in thee is undiminished, nay, stronger than before. Wilt thou receive my hand?”

“Not yet,” answered Sewantus, stepping

proudly back. "My breast is not yet delivered of its burden; there is something yet to be told."

"Sewantus has found out lately that he is not fated to live alone in his lodge, and die without a child to call him father, and to carry down his name and his memory."

"In the time of battle, when the knife was at his heart, there came to him a gentle manitou, who said, 'Live, Sewantus, for my sake!' It was painted in her bright countenance by the inward thought. Sewantus saw it. It spoke plainly to him. He could not be deceived."

"Now his heart grew all at once warm towards this one, who was of his own colour, and of a port goodly as a mountain ash: and he said to himself, 'It is proper to plant this young sapling of the sunset in the Maqua's lodge.' And Sewantus took his opportunity and spoke, and nay was not said unto him. It is enough; Heladee is pledged to the son of Ka-na-ro-kos; does my brother understand?"

"He does," returned Conrad, gratified beyond expression, by an intimation which promised such a happy prospective to each of the parties concerned; while, at the same time, he could appreciate the motives which conduced to an act in which generosity seemed to have a principal share.

“Then I can make a new compact with my brother,” rejoined Sewantus; “my heart is clean now—I am ready to take his hand.”

There was no shade upon the face of either when they re-joined the party at the bivouac fire.

From this time forth nothing interposed to check the progress of the travellers. With the death of the evil being who had been the original cause of all their troubles, the fickle goddess chose to relent, and deigned to favour them with smiles, in lieu of the frowns which she had so long worn. The sorcerer was no more, and they went on in harmony and with cheerful spirits over many a barren waste, where neither tree nor shrub grew, and where an incrustation of salt often covered the ground to the depth of several inches, like a sheet of newly-fallen snow; through broad regions likewise, where there could not be found a single drop of water to cool the tip of the tongue withal, and where the prairie-dog alone formed a resting-place in the arid soil. Tracts there were, of blue saline grass, sand, and scattered stones, in which the prickly-pear disfigured the ground with a close-set panoply of spines, and gave severe annoyance to the horses, that were obliged, for an interval of many days, to pick their painful way, as though an endless myriad of porcupines, with quills erect, lay threatening in the path.

Then the scene would change, and in succession there burst upon them, like a fresh creation, beautiful alluvial valleys, with their rich groves of cotton-wood and box elder, their gorgeous vegetation covering the lawns with herb and flower : winding rivers and immeasurable plains. Then would they encounter the wary denizens of the wild, who gazed at them, and tossed their antlered heads with impatience and alarm.

The elk, the wapiti-deer, and sometimes, the prairie-horse, flew in troops away as they scented their coming in the wind; while the fleet antelope darted on in ellipses, before them, approached them on their flanks, or stood still and took a curious survey of the strangers. And under the tufts of absinth the large sage-rabbit cowered timidly until they had passed by.

Sometimes herds of buffaloes blackened the pasture lands in countless numbers, reaching from one horizon to the other, and beyond, in a confused, living mass. In this range they were sure to fall in with those inseparable attendants of the bison, hunters, and wolves; but the latter had neither leisure nor inclination to molest the little party, and from the former they were sure to receive a hearty welcome, and obtain, unsolicited; whatever necessities they stood in need of, without the donors being willing to accept any equivalent in return.

Sometimes, also, the sky was obscure, and their usual guide, the sun, invisible. Then they shaped their course over the interminable waste by the inclination of the grass, the lay of the hills and ravines, and the movement of the clouds; for the wind blows generally in one direction, south-west, upon these grand plateaus.

By good management their subsistence seldom ran short; but it was as various in kind as the features of the general landscape; consisting, in times of plenty, of buffalo, deer, prairie-hens, and often cherries and service-berries; and in times of scarcity, of these last, together with the *pomme-blanche*, commote, and other esculent roots, and even wild rose-buds, at a pinch: a species of diet more romantic than nutritious, we will allow.

While their food and tea, of wild cherry-bark, was prepared for the most part at a fire of buffalo chips (*bois-de-vache*) in the absence of other fuel.

They witnessed, moreover, some remarkable spectacles in that long journey; both remarkable and sad.

Now they filed slowly through the ruins of a sacked village, a blot upon the smiling prairie, with its cinders and wasteful desolation; and presenting a woeful memento of the cruelties and ruthless aggressions of the savages of the West.

Now the feet of a horse went crashing through a human skull, and they discovered that they were passing through an ancient cemetery of some unknown tribe; for carefully arranged in circles on the ground were numerous skulls, bleached by long exposure, and resting each upon a tuft of sweet-smelling herbs, placed there at the last visit by some kindred hand.

The travellers picked their way with circumspection among these rings, that they might not disturb the mouldering relics.

Poor deserted mansions, how forlorn they look! Refuse shells they were, cast up from life's ocean, upon the charnel strand with door and window open, through which the wind wandered with a mournful wail, and the wasp crept stealthily to build her paper nest in the empty palace of the soul.

On one occasion, by the shore of the Mississippi, they tarried for a few days at another place of graves, where the dead were placed on high stages, swathed and decorated with war trophies; the usual mode of burial in the far west. Here they found a large concourse of natives belonging to several cognate tribes, who had assembled together in general convocation for the worship of the Great Spirit, and to celebrate the solemn

“festival of the dead;” as was their wont, after a certain term of years.

In fine, the travellers crossed in due course, the different branches of the Mississippi without mishap, or suffering any want save that of water, a scarcity of which is but too common throughout the vast regions that lie between the eastern borders of the prairies and the rocky mountains, and beyond them even to the shore of the Pacific ocean. The Sahara itself breeds not thirst more intolerable than the dry winds of the parched table-lands.

At last they arrived in the vicinity of the Great Lakes of Canada, and meeting with some friendly Indians, who were busily employed in gathering wild rice that grew in the shallows of a river, they bartered their horses for canoes, and an ample supply of pemican and maize, embarked without delay, descended the prairie stream north-eastward, into Lake Erie; and with a joyous cheer, pointed their prows towards the European settlements and the country of the Five Nations.

CHAPTER XXII.

A JOYFUL SURPRISE—THE WELCOME HOME.

WITHIN a handsomely furnished apartment in the town of Albany, from the windows of which the eye could embrace a commanding view of the flourishing capital, with its numerous gardens bordering the Hudson, upon which a fleet of small craft lay flapping its sails and pennons lazily in the breeze: together with the beautiful country beyond, and the ridges of the Helderbergs and Catskill mountains;—there sat a lady.

• The table on which she leant was strewn with newspapers in the German type, and a few volumes richly embossed with silver, in the missal style; and over these was cast a frame of embroidery work which she had put aside.

The tenant of this luxurious abode was scarcely past her prime, and elegantly formed; very deli-

cate and refined also was her beauty; yet this delicacy seemed to proceed less from ill health than a highly-sensitive organization, and her complexion, though purely white, was exquisitely fair.

There was, moreover, in her air, features, and indeed in her whole appearance, that indefinable stamp of birth and breeding which instantly strikes the observer, and exacts respect; while in her mild, intellectual countenance, her compressed mouth and large blue eyes, a subdued, melancholy expression, spoke of some chastening sorrow not ill-suited to the widow's garb she wore, and awakened kindlier sympathies and a friendly solicitude in the observer.

And one stood there who, conscious as he was of the distance that separated them, felt relieved, each moment, of a portion of the constraint her presence had imposed, as he contemplated the face of the lady and saw it kindle up with vivid interest in what he had to say. Besides, the turn of each particular trait, together with the manner of the lady; something in the tone of the voice and the carriage of the head reminded him, pleasingly, of one with whom he had been long familiar.

A tall robust man in the dress of an Indian, belted and mocassined, he stood with his arms

folded and with an air of nonchalance that smacked more of the green-wood than a lady's boudoir. But his aquiline and embrowned features were possessed of sufficient frankness to denote the integrity of the man, in despite of a remarkable wildness of exterior.

There was a sort of rude grandeur stamped in the vigorous development of this person, the freedom of his posture, together with the bold bearing of his breast and head, from which long elf-locks flowed like a mane: that contrasted singularity with the fair occupant of the chamber; who in his presence, experienced sensations not dissimilar, at first, to those we feel on beholding some fierce animal of a foreign breed, tamed and set at large.

A third person also was present. This was a stout, thick-set man in homespun, with a phlegmatic aspect and a wooden leg, who had seated himself at the solicitation of the lady, and never moved his eyes from her face, in eager expectation of being addressed: while he crossed his hands over a stick planted upright upon the floor, and pressed the brim of an antiquated beaver between his fore-finger and thumb.

"The pith of the matter is this, madam," said Couteau-croche,—for the tall forester gave that as his name—speaking in French, and venturing

a more direct thrust at the object of his previous discourse, which had taken rather a circuitous range; "that being arrived in this town of Orange or Beaver-wick, as I have heard it called—from a far country, I bethought me of a comrade's message which I promised to deliver, in case at any time I might happen to strike upon the path leading into these clearings: but I found myself a stranger in the land, unused to the speech of the people and their ways. I had somewhat of a difficulty in keeping the trail, until I fell in with my brave friend here, who I discovered to be an old acquaintance of this comrade of mine, and of his people; so without more ado, I struck ahead in the prints of his hickory, and here we are."

The emotions of the lady were of the most lively description at this address; she turned red and pale several times, half rose from her seat, with some violent impulse: recovered herself, and faltered out, alternately in French and German as she addressed them both, hurriedly:

"A message to me? and from a far country? Hans, what is this? can it concern my child? Speak, good man: whence come you? and your companion—what said he? was the message you spoke of truly intended for me?—tell me quickly, I cannot brook delay."

"It was, lady," was the calm reply, while the

excited questioner pressed her hand to her side and appeared to suffer pain.

"Be tranquil, my lady, be not troubled in mind," suggested Hans, for he was the third party present—speaking the words soothingly, in his mother tongue; "of a surety the foreigner has that to tell which will surprise you quite. I would fain believe him to be honest too, and straight-hearted for a French *loper*, despite his seeming rudeness and outlandish ways."

"Give ear to me, good lady, and you shall soon know all I have to say, for it is briefly told," rejoined the hunter, in a deliberate tone, and with an earnestness of manner that precluded all suspicion of his veracity :

"And whatever there be discovered of over freedom or ungentleness in the behaviour of him who stands before you, I pray you give it pardon, good lady, and forget it in the reason which brought me here: seeing that, for all the roughness of the bark, the core is sound.

"I am a man of the woods, a free trader and a wanderer, I may say, ever since I could carry a gun, and therefore little skilled in the conceits of the settlements, having no use for them in my calling: but let that rest.

"It was out west, upon a discovery hunt, beyond the range of the fur-traders of New-

France, that I fell in with the comrade ye wot of: a white man like myself, saving across, astray among Red-Skins, but younger, and, for the matter of that, a couple of shades nearer to you in the colour of his face, than I am; but it does not signify.

“ Well, you see, we became friends, and kept together for a spell, and when we parted at last, and I turned my face to the sunrise, and cried, home! he desired of me, if ever I chanced to be within call of the British territory to send word to Fort Orange that Conrad Wildenstein, who, when a boy, had been taken prisoner at the ransacking of Corlaer, years ago: was alive and hearty, and would ere long, with the favour of God, find his way back to the clearings.

“ And furthermore, he bid me if I heard aught of a mother of his who had gone a voyage over the sea, he said, and of whom he had received no tidings, and believed to be dead; to deliver unto her his dear love, and desire her to be of good heart, for that he would surely return and make her happy, since he had always remembered her, he said, though as one who was no more in the land: always and well. And for a proof that this was no lying tale, he sent with it a token,—here it is; I need say no more. When you look upon it, lady, you will see yourself clearly in it, as in a pocket mirror; it is enough.”

As he concluded, he drew from the breast of his leather shirt a small miniature, and put it into the lady's hands, who seized it eagerly, and with a look of instant recognition not unwarranted ; for within it she beheld a younger likeness of herself. Then she laid it on the table and hid her face upon it, and they heard her sobs.

"Alack," soliloquised Hans, "it is the very trinket was hanging from the neck of the young master, on that rueful night. I remind me of the way it shone in the light of the burning, when he was thrown from the horse into the snow, and I took to flight from the homestead of old Gottlieb Van Scheffler. And my poor Martha, she bid me be honest and true and to have good faith, and we would meet again ; these were the very words she spoke, as I heard him say. Now this doth move me. A good girl, a good sister was Martha. It was a grievous thing to die as she did, on the winter road a captive to the heathen. * Now could Hans weep ; — now could he hide his face like the mistress ; Alack ! alack !"

"Let the spring settle," thought the *voyageur*, "ere we throw into it another stone."

The lady after a time controlled her agitation, and asked,

"Where was it, my good friend, that you met this lost son of mine ? for if you know it not

already, learn that I am that mother who was accounted among the drowned, and that the intelligence you bring is overtrying to a heart incredulous of hopeful tidings, which have proved ever a mockery that only caused the wound to bleed anew. Tell me of him, his condition, his looks: all that you know about my poor boy?"

"As to his condition," replied the other, "he was as sturdy a brave as ere bestrode a mustang, or ran a wild cow to the death, when I saw him last; and as to looks, put the matter of a beard and a few bold strokes in the picture I brought, and you will have him to the life; for he is his mother's son in features as well as fact, and his birth-marks do no discredit to her, by the mass! that is plain."

"But why has he remained so long away?" inquired the mother, anxiously; "what keeps him yet in the wilderness?—above all, tell, oh! tell me, when shall I expect him home?" She gave a convulsive sigh as she spoke the words, and her lips trembled.

"Shortly, lady, shortly, I imagine," was the embarrassed answer, as Couteau-croche withdrew his eyes from the supplicating countenance of the questioner, and seemed perplexed.

"He is coming to the point now," thought Hans; "it will be the killing of her, I do

believe, and break her tender heart-cords with joy."

"The fact is," rejoined the forester, labouring at a bright suggestion and bringing it forth with a sudden effort; "the fact is, my lady, nature will be nature to the end of the world, and youth will still appear foolish to the eyes of older folk, who see things in a different light, and call it wisdom. For my part, I cannot understand why young people should be called foolish, when like the birds they take a fancy to one another and go in pairs. Who is wiser than the *bon Dieu*? and if he puts these likings into young hearts, who shall say them nay? Not I, faith, not I.

"So you see this brave son of yours, discovered in his travels a face that pleased him, and he followed after the one who bore it far into the heart of the great western land to deliver her from slavery and win her mayhap as a reward; at any rate, if he did think so, he was equal to his intention, having fulfilled it. And what is more is this: that he might live long and search wide ere he could find one more worthy of him!"

A shade of strong displeasure passed over the lady's countenance at this startling intimation, qualified though it was by the terms in which it was couched. The mother's heart in its fond rapture seemed to meet with a rebuff, and to

become less confident and joyous in its anticipations. In fancy she had already folded her long lost boy to her bosom, and poured forth the store of her accumulated love without restraint or the faintest apprehension of estrangement. It was hard, very hard for her now to think that her place was preoccupied, and that, at the most, she could henceforth expect only to share with another the affections she had regarded as exclusively her own.

Thus it ever is: the dupes of an exaggerating faith, we cannot discover without a secret pang, how impotent we are to fill entirely with our image the measure of a single heart, and that where we hoped to reign for ever paramount a host of rivals have crept in to dispute a title in which the blindness of our great love beheld no flaw.

Alas then for the maternal sentiment—the generous, the idolizing, the unchangeable! Where in this world shall it meet with a commensurate return? The human mother is the pelican that feeds her offspring with her lifeblood, and still they leave her. She plants and nourishes in self-sacrifice and tribulation, and the stranger plucks the fruit!

With the knowledge of this new tie, moreover, there arose certain misgivings relative to the

object of her son's attachment, which did not fail to occasion deep disquietude in the lady's mind, though a feeling of delicacy made her refrain, for the present, from further inquiry on the subject; but she asked abruptly,

"Where is this country in which my son tarries? could a messenger reach him from me, to hasten his return? I would not spare cost, were it needful, or hesitate to go myself. A mother's eagerness will not be stayed by trifles, and I can nerve myself to the task, fragile and helpless as you may consider me, strong man. A mother can dare all things for the sake of her child."

"I believe it, dear lady," replied Couteau-croche, in low and kindly accents, sweeping his rough hand slowly across his brow, it might be to smooth a rippled line that rose suddenly there at the closing words; "but neither wealth nor love, though of the mightiest, could avail to do that which you desire. Little are you aware of the distance and perils to be overcome ere one could reach that far land; neither is it needful, thank God! the grass will turn sear many times, and grow long in that path before it feels again the pressure of a white man's foot upon it; ay, very long!"

"What mean you?" demanded the lady, with a perplexed air.

“That which I said before. Thy son’s thoughts were fixed upon the homeward trail when I parted from him, therefore is it in nowise unlikely that now, even while we are speaking of him, he is drawing nigh us, step by step. There are more unlikely things do happen frequently, my lady, therefore have a care: for if I judge aright there are other feelings besides the sorrowful can pierce one, keenly as a knife point, if pressed on indiscreetly; be fortified against thyself, lady, for too much joy at once is said to be dangerous, and I would not harm thee.”

“You speak to me in maxims, and give me I know not what wild fancies. Torture me not, for it is cruel, and I have suffered much. Speak more clearly, I entreat you. Am I to believe that my son is now on his way hither?”

“Even so,” was the reply.

“Then,” rejoined she, “it is as I suspected; you know more than you would have me to suppose. Keep me no longer in suspense, my good friend; once more I ask, what is it you mean?”

“That I have a conceit to play the Mystery-man for the nonce,” replied the *voyageur* in a lively tone, changing his whole demeanour, and drawing a long-bladed knife from its sheath at his belt, which made the lady shrink back aghast

at the strange movement and the bared weapon; but Couteau-croche added quickly,

“Fear not, lady, there is no need; but I will show thee a conjurer’s trick, the like of which thou hast not seen, nor will see again, I’ll warrant, long as thy life lasts, and may that be long! A true miracle, by the mass: else the son of my father is a fool!”

“It is coming now for a certainty,” thought the patient Hans, opening his eyes to their fullest extent, to discover by what species of necromancy the grand secret was about to be divulged, and not altogether free from mistrust of the audacious woodsman whose conduct was so threatening and unconventional.

“Now mark me,” continued the latter, assuming an important air, and approaching the table, near the surface of which he held the knife with the blade turned uppermost; “when I strike thrice upon the board, there will straightway appear strangers in the lodge. One for every blow, alive and strong!”

Suiting the action to the word, as he uttered the monosyllables, “one, two, three,” he brought the haft down sharply on the massive furniture, and at the loud summons, footsteps were heard in a room adjoining; the door opened—what saw the mother then? A tall young man habited like the

voyageur, and a maiden beautiful and blushing as the dawn.

Another look: did her heart whisper falsely? The long fair curls, the blue eyes, the winning smile were there: she could not be deceived.

“Oh, my mother! my mother!” cried Conrad, and springing forward, he fell on his knees before her, and she dropped with a wild shriek into his arms.

In that happy trance she rested, peacefully as death, her head pillowed upon the shoulder that could well support her now; and Conrad bent down and pressed his cheek to hers, and wept most joyful tears: and those who were the witnesses of the spectacle remarked in that affecting moment how very beautiful the resemblance was between the two.

“Where am I?” muttered the lady, awakening as from sleep, with a sigh, and speaking in her native language as her gaze wandered vaguely over the face beside her; “methought I dreamt, and that I heard a voice calling me—Mother, and they said my darling boy had come back to me again. Is it so?”

“It is! It is, dear mother! See, it is Conrad who holds thee in his embrace; recollect thyself and look upon me. Am I so changed?”

She raised her hand and moved it softly over

his features, and put back the hair from his forehead, and smiled; a smile of bright and fond intelligence it was,—a gleam of rapture for which there is no name. She twined her fingers caressingly in his hair again, as she was once accustomed to do. Then association came back, full and powerful as a tide, and with it came consciousness and tears.

Let us drop the curtain here; for it would be a sort of profanation, even if we possessed the power, to portray a bliss like that which hallowed the meeting of the mother and her child, and rendered it no unworthy forecast of the glorious hereafter of restoration to the loved!

“Thou hast another child, my mother, and I must not engross to myself thy whole love,” said Conrad in English: releasing himself from the arms that still enclasped him, when these first moments were past, and leading Ellen forward by the hand. “I can well spare a portion of it to my affianced. We will partake of it alike, mother;—see, I have brought a new claimant to your heart and home.”

The lady stared, with undisguised astonishment at this fair stranger, who appeared before her in a relation so endearing and peculiar. Was this the syren she had been picturing to her fastidious mother-fancy, in such unflattering guise,

as stepping in between her offspring and herself, to wean him from his home?

One glance at that ingenuous countenance was enough to dispel all doubt, and make her eager to atone for the unworthy wrong. Her arms opened wide and encircled Ellen in a warm greeting, and as she pressed her to her bosom, she said most tenderly, "My dear child! my sweet daughter, it will not be a task to love thee. And thou wilt learn to look upon me as Conrad does, and call me—mother."

"I have no need, mother," sobbed Ellen, kissing the hand of that strange lady, and smiling through her tears; "I have long loved thee even as Conrad, who taught me to know one he believed long since dead. "I am a poor maiden without a parent in the world, whom, but for thy son, had still borne an exile's lot. Wilt thou take me for thy child?"

"With my whole soul, darling, and I call the Almighty to witness the solemn pledge. The widow's house will be solitary no longer."

Thus it was that the beautiful wanderer was received into her new home.

But who are those in the back-ground, apart from the group, and dimly shadowed by the twilight of the chamber, where they stand, like figures of antique sculpture?

They had entered quietly, and remained without attracting observation, during the foregoing scene; but now the lady's eye marked them and turned inquiringly to Conrad.

"They are our faithful and esteemed friends," said he, in a whisper; "and for the present will share your hospitality: receive them kindly, dear mother,—the ground we stand upon is theirs." Then he added aloud, in the Indian tongue: "Come forth Sewantus, and bring thy prairie-flower hither. My mother waits to give welcome to her guests;—the Red-people must not be strangers in this lodge."

"Good," quoth Couteau-eroche, approvingly; "keep the covenant-chain bright, and the tree of peace will flourish over it; let us sit under its shade."

They approached then, but diffidently, for their souls were awed; and it required no slight effort on the part of Conrad and his parent to place them at their ease in that unwonted presence. Heladee looked distressed, and started like a captured antelope, at every movement of the lady, and gazed with looks of wild amazement at each article in the room; so curious and wonderful they seemed to the forest child.

But kindness at length prevailed; and after Ellen had wound her arms around her, and talked

affectionately to her, in the language of the West, the foundling of the Medicine Bows smiled and wept by turns, and appeared to be more at home. But the atmosphere of the settlements weighed upon her, and she was not the same spirited creature she had been in other scenes.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONCLUSION.

THAT evening the lamp-light shone on a cluster of happy faces in the widow's home. What sweet sensations stole, with all the freshness of a second childhood, over the souls of those who had so long been debarred the pleasures and associations of their early life! The ties of home and country were insensibly renewed: and, surrounded by the mild refinements of civilization, they reflected with a sort of incredulity, upon the career of rude vicissitude and continual excitement they had passed through.

But the tale of wild romance, fictitious as it appeared to them then, blended not inharmoniously with the present, and glided gently into it, like the interlude of a song, whenever

their eyes rested upon their companions, who sat, in their picturesque forest garb, beside them.

“Now, first of all, let us hear all about thyself, dear mother,” said Conrad to his parent; “where hast thou been, all these years, and why was it we heard not from thee, after the time you left us for the Father-land?”

Then holding clasped a hand of each, she told Conrad and his betrothed, how the vessel in which she sailed chanced to run down another, in the night time, and that, although she escaped the fate which befel the stranger, who disappeared with every soul on board, beneath the keel that cut like a great ploughshare over her, the condition of the survivor was distressing enough; for it was only by the greatest exertions they were enabled to keep afloat, until a few days after when they fell in with an English trader who took them off the shattered hull, and carried them into a British port, after a tedious voyage. And how that the letters she had written subsequently, together with those of the other individuals who had taken passage in the abandoned vessel, were intercepted on the way, by a French cruiser, and never reached their destination : as she had since learned.

And that after some delay, for want of safe conduct, she had crossed over to Germany, and accomplished a settlement of her affairs without

any great difficulty; as the party whose claims had threatened to prove a serious obstacle to her, failing in evidence, had quietly withdrawn his protest, and left the courts to decide the question in favour of the original heir, who thus found herself in secure possession of the valuable property, bequeathed to her, as formerly stated, by a distant relative that died abroad; without having to pass through the ordeal of chicanery and wearisome procrastination, usually inseparable from a legal process of the kind. Then, she told them, in the ensuing spring, came a letter: the first received in answer to such as she had been enabled to send, at rare intervals and often by indirect channels, to the loved ones in the New World,

It fell like a stroke of Heaven's wrath upon the fabric of her worldly schemes, and seemed to her as a punishment for fixing her thoughts too strongly upon her newly acquired wealth. Alas! what availed it then, when those on whose account she had chiefly valued it, were no more!

That fatal missive informed her of her husband's death, together with the destruction of Schenectady, in which her beloved and only child was seemingly involved.

A doubt existed, it was true, relative to the fate of her Conrad, and this sufficed to shed a

single ray upon the widow's sinking heart which else, in its double bereavement, would have been dark indeed.

Some of the prisoners who were liberated at the departure of the marauding band, affirmed that they had seen her son after the massacre, and that he was among the number of those who accompanied the enemy in their return to Canada.

Clinging to this, therefore, as to the last fond tie that bound her to the world, she returned to America, and exerted the influence which the means now at her command gave her, in obtaining intelligence of the missing boy. She then became aware of his captivity, and learned sufficient of his subsequent movements to be convinced that he was yet alive, and if nothing material interfered, would eventually be restored to her arms: in which trust, she said, she had waited patiently the slow progress of events, until the issue confirmed it.

Then Conrad, in his turn, related what had taken place in the interval of separation; and if the mother's tears flowed freely, during the first part of the recital that referred to his father's last illness, and to the dire calamity which befel those with whom he had found an asylum, at his death: these mournful retrospections were soon lost, in the absorbing interest of his after adventures:

until, at the close, there remained in the maternal heart no feeling but that of fervent gratitude and joy for the mercy vouchsafed, and the victory won.

“The hard probation is at an end, my children,” said she, with a smile, and speaking impressively :

“Let us be happy now, and may the Great Disposer of all things keep us ever mindful of the debt we owe to him, for teaching us the real value of his blessings!

“By the light of suffering it is that we arise superior to the common life: those who have never known sorrow cannot be truly wise.”

Couteau-croche and Hans, meanwhile, were seated in a neighbouring hostel, amid a circle of curious listeners, to whom the honest German related, as was his custom whenever he could obtain a hearing, the woeful chase he had run on the night of the massacre, in relation to which he displayed his wooden member with evident pride, and the self-complacency of one who, at a sacrifice, had grown distinguished in the wars.

Neither did the *voyageur* fail to make the queues of the grave burgomasters, that were present, shake with involuntary terror at the sights he had seen, and the perils he had encountered in the wild Indian country from whence he had lately come.

That night they smoked many pipes: nay, Couteau-croche said afterwards, that he never beheld such a cloud as the fat Meinheers raised in that *chientè*: and that if they were men of few words, they had a great appetite for the calumet, and would be considered grand medicine at a council fire.

Little remains now to be told. Conrad, accompanied by his young bride and mother, left shortly after his marriage, on a visit to his native land; on a visit only, for he could not wean himself from his predilections for the country which was now doubly endeared to him by the recollection of the past, and in which it was his wish to take up his permanent abode.

The crowded haunts of Europe possessed little charm for one whose mind had outgrown convention in the virgin solitudes of the west. And his ambition was of an unpretending order that did not require the aliment of popular excitement to satisfy its plain desires. He believed that it sufficed for him to be sincere and faithful in his friendships, true to himself, and just to his fellow men.

The lord of that fair realm comprised within the circle of his home, and of the sweet spirit who was his minister and presiding genius there, he

aimed at no higher object than to keep it pure and happy ; and if his influence was greater than his ambition, it was only because the lustre of the gem betrayed its quality afar, and the tribute of the world is freely paid to the reputation of an honourable and an able man.

He purchased an estate in the beautiful valley of the Mohawk, from the tribe whose camp fires were still lighted in its sylvan groves, and he could mingle freely, as of old, with the ancient people, and lived among them, more in the quality of a patron than a foreigner. Indeed, on more than one occasion he contrived, as they expressed it, "to bury under the leaves" the memory of certain grievances which threatened to rupture the bond that existed, though imperfectly, between the English and their native allies, whose dominion was passing insensibly from the soil : and who were becoming more wary and tenacious of their rights, as each surge of the tide of foreign emigration swept further on in its encroachments upon their ancestral glades.

Sewantus-walie was received with acclamations by his countrymen, who looked upon him as one returned from the spirit-land : and they gave his gentle companion a cordial welcome at the village which was to be her future home.

In a few years the stern old chief, Ka-na-ro-kos died, and, by general consent, the son was chosen in his stead, as the one most worthy to preside over the interests of the powerful tribe to which he belonged. And he soon became distinguished for his wisdom and moderation: tempering the firmness of his parent with a milder and more considerate course than the latter had chosen to pursue. And if the Maquas feared him less, they loved him far more than his predecessor, and he was content.

His word obtained great weight also with the other tribes composing the famous alliance, in which the Mohawks held a conspicuous place: and at the grand councils of the confederates, the leaders were ever ready to listen with respect to the representative of the principal establishment of the Maquas; for though young, they knew that he had the thoughtfulness of an old man, and was one of the few who could not be bought over by the secret machinations of their enemies.

Besides which, a rumour that prevailed of his wealth, which arose from the liberal efforts he was making, at his own cost, to introduce agriculture and the social arts among his people, by means of the donation of King Unicum, transmuted into a more profitable shape through the

agency of Conrad, failed not to increase his popularity, and to give him more importance as a leader in the affairs of the Indian republic.

Couteau-croche went back to Canada, and settled down, for a season, as a *habitant*, on a slip of land by the St. Lawrence ; purchased with a portion of Conrad's treasure, which the latter had insisted upon his accepting when they parted. But it was not in the nature of things that the ranger of the woods and waters should be suddenly transformed into a quiet tiller of the ground ; and so, after a while, he became disgusted with his new vocation, and gave up in despair, when a happy thought struck him. He would seek out the family of his former comrade, Chaudron Rouge, who was since dead, and choose from it a successor to his rights and privileges as a landholder.

This plan he carried into effect, forthwith, and finding that the sister of the old *voyageur* was withheld from entering into matrimony by indigence only, he made her his heir, installed the young couple in his homestead, reserved for himself a place by the hearthside, whenever he liked to avail himself of it ; and then, with a clear conscience, resumed the pursuits for which both nature and habit had best adapted him.

And often, in the course of his wanderings, in

the double capacity of a fur-trader and confidential agent of the Canadian government, in its negotiations with the Iroquois, during a lull in the great struggle between the rival crowns; he would step over the Alleghaneys, have a friendly talk with Sewantus, and steal a look at his old comrade Conrad; which he could easily do, for he had only to cross a portage from the Mohawk Bourg, launch a canoe, and in a few hours it would float him down to his very doors.

There, the first person he usually beheld, was Hans, grown very corpulent and phlegmatic, in his capacity of domestic in ordinary to the establishment; partly on account of the ill-defined nature of his functions, which afforded little exercise to his body; and partly from the lopped condition of the latter, which unfitted him for locomotion, and gives a tendency to fat.

But although he had expanded into a notable impersonation of the *otium cum dignitate* of sedentary life, he never failed to stump along quite briskly on his hickory supporter, at the hearty greeting of the Canadian, and grew suddenly loquacious as he ushered him into the presence of the domestic circle.

The course of years brought new endearments together with a portion, not undue, of the inevi-

table adjuncts, care, and tribulation, to those whose history we have been pursuing; but such is human life.

There are also some tender flowers which shine only in the shade, and the heart, in its affliction, grows prolific of gentle feelings, not the less beautiful because their nourishment is tears.

Adversity is a solemn teacher, reminding us, from time to time, of what we are and what is expected of us, which we might otherwise forget; it deepens the home-love, and unfolds its purest treasures that in prosperity lie dormant and unrevealed.

And thus the time arrived when the son of Conrad renewed, with the son of Sewantus, the bond of friendship their fathers had contracted at a similar age, though under auspices so dissimilar and which had never become cold; and many a buck lowered his proud antlers within the range of the young hunters, when they followed the chase together among the mountains of the Iroquois.

Ofttimes, too, the grave chieftain would hold the boys enchained, as he repeated to them the principal passages in the narrative of the long journey their sires had once accomplished, among the nations of the far west: nor would he fail to

pay a passing tribute to the memory of the good companion they left there at rest, in the prairie wild; telling how faithful he was, and how brave.

Then in the earnest countenance of the fair-haired Saxon youth, upturned to his, the speaker would behold again the spirit of his brother-friend and glide back into other days, while each feature recalled softly the image of her who had once shaken his noble heart with an agitation upon which he could look calmly then; but with a subdued sadness, as on a struggle which, though past and gone for ever, had cost him dear.

And still another shape would usurp the place of this, and glow with a cheerful warmth upon its clear and cold obscure: that never failed to exorcise the shadow of the past, as in its first coming, it had brought assuagement to his anguish, and redeemed him from despair.

The fond and comely Heladee was by his side, the mother of his boy, and accounted as the noblest matron in the lodges of the Maquas; it was enough. As Conrad once told him, she was the most precious jewel he had brought back with him from the sunset, and he loved her well.

And so did Ellen; and her mother also, as she descended peacefully into the vale of years, had ample reason to approve the regular intercourse

that existed between the families, and to correct the false impressions of a foreigner which she once possessed, respecting those who enjoyed, after a different fashion, the bounties of their God, and who had taught her children, not unwisely, to live in accordance with nature.

THE END.

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